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The M o n o c a r s were zipping by every eight seconds.

illustration by EMSH

There was neither physical nor mental illness in society, and everyone had a very high IQ. But Chris thought that, somewhere, a heavy price had been paid — and proved it when he became

THE DISAPPEARING MAN

Novelet

by Theodore L. Thomas

(author of "The Innocents' Refuge")

NO LONGER must I keep this thing to myself. I am tired of this running and hiding, though I would continue indefinitely if it were necessary. But I know now I'm right: Henry Bragencwesan has done more harm to the human race than any individual or force in the history of mankind. I can prove this to anyone who will listen, and don't think I can't make people listen; I already have.

It makes me very happy to inform you that the Bragencwesan System carries the seeds of its own destruction; the very intelligence it produces in people will yet be its downfall. So let the doctors use the Bragencwesan System to eliminate all stress and tension. Let them turn human beings into a race of fine strong healthy people immune to—excuse me—sickness, and having the highest sense of morals the world has

ever known. Let them eliminate disease and selfishness, and greed and irresponsibility. Let them. But if I want to be—excuse me—sick, it is my right to be so. If I want to challenge the work of Henry Bragencwesan I shall do so.

Do not think you can laugh this off with a pitying shake of the head. Do not think that the citizens will soon lead me to a doctor's couch so that I can be made normal again. This can not happen, as you will soon know; you have already heard of me and of the things I can do.

I am the man who disappears.

THE MAN who disappears is a human being, of Earth, not someone or something from outer space.

It is difficult for me to decide where to start. The whole thing came up so gradually that I was not aware of it myself for quite a long time. But perhaps it will be best to start with my own recognition that something was wrong with me—or more properly, that I was different from other people in some way.

I think recognition occurred the night I took my wife, Laura, to see *The Importance of Being Ernest.* I arrived home from work about the same time Laura did. We sipped drinks while we watched the end of a baseball game. We decided that I should shower first, so I went off to do it. I remember that I set the spray to an unusually hot setting and stayed in the shower an unusually long time; somehow it felt good.

I came out, dried myself, and stepped out of the bathroom just as Laura was coming in. The redness of my skin from the long hot shower caught her eye. She stopped and ran a cool hand across my chest and down my side. "Why, Chris," she said. "Look how red you are."

I smiled and kissed her and she put both her arms around my waist. She squeezed me and then suddenly pulled away. She placed her hands just above my hips and gently grasped two generous handsful of the flesh around my waist. I didn't realize what she was doing until I looked down and saw it. I was too stunned to speak; for a moment, Laura was, too. She looked up at me, finally, and said, "Chris what is this? What has happened to you?"

I FELT A sudden surge of something I now know was anger sear through my whole body. I almost knocked her hands from my side but I caught myself in time. Although I did not realize it then, this peculiar restraint—which I do not exercise consciously—has been what has saved me all this time; without it I would never have discovered this thing.

In any case, I took her

hands away gently, patted her on the cheek, and kissed her lightly. But she was not to be put off so easily.

She said, "Chris, I'm worried. You seem to be—forgive me, darling—overweight. Shouldn't you visit a doctor?"

Without even thinking about it, I said, "It's all right, Laura. I talked to one at the plant the day before yesterday. He said that the chemicals in the air disturbed my metabolism, and that I might put on a little excess weight. That's all it is, I'm perfectly normal."

"Oh. I'm so glad. I was worried." She patted me on the stomach and went in to take her shower.

As I dressed, I tried to understand what had happened. The inexplicable extra flesh around my middle was bad enough, but what really concerned me was what I had said to Laura. You see I had not talked to a doctor at all; I had told Laura of an event that had not really happened. Never in my life had I done such a thing, nor had anyone else to my knowledge. My mind churned with confusion, and my hands actually trembled; I found myself engaged in a struggle to bring myself under control so that my actions would be normal. And by the time Laura emerged from the bathroom I was almost completely dressed and acting as I always had.

WE LEFT the house a short while later. We took a sideway belt to a stop, I dialed for a car and made small talk with Laura until one veered from the monorail and pulled up in front of us. All the way to the waiter restaurant, I successfully kept my troubles deep in the back of my mind.

When we arrived, we found Jeff and Kate Drawson waiting for us. The head waiter escorted us to a table and we sat down.

"Anybody care for a cocktail?" asked Jeff.

Laura declined, saying we had just had some. She looked at me strangely when I said that I would join Jeff and Kate in another. The drinks arrived; and we sipped them, and I began to feel better. The Drawsons were our best friends; I was very fond of both Jeff and Kate. Under Jeff's amiable banter I began to relax.

"You know," said Jeff, "these waiters have an interesting job. They deal with people constantly and they meet all types. I think I'll take a waiter's job when my next chance to rotate comes along."

"Why, Jeff," said Kate, "what a wonderful idea. I'll rotate with you. We could work together in the same restaurant; it may be even more fun than selling clothes."

"I'll bet it will." Jeff

turned to Laura and me. "How about you two joining us? The four of us could have a fine time."

"No thanks," Laura laughed. "I'm happy being an archivist, and we'd never get Chris here to be anything but a technician."

"Right," I said. "I've tried a few of these gregarious occupations, and I prefer the one I'm in now."

KATE SAID, "Everyone to his taste, although I don't see how you can enjoy being in a place that always smells like a circus."

"Oh that smell is deliberate," said Jeff. "They use perfume on Chris' job."

"They do?" I asked blankly.

"Sure," he said. "And you know what perfume is; it's any odor that's used to drown out a less acceptable one."

We all laughed. I saw Laura start to say something and my heart turned to stone as I realized what it was. She was going to tell the Drawsons what I had told her about the smelly chemicals and my metabolism. But Jeff, not noticing that Laura was about to speak, continued talking about the joys of being a waiter. My panic slowly ebbed away.

The main course arrived. I finished mine first and ordered another. When desert was done, I ordered more of that, too; somehow I couldn't seem to get enough to eat.

Jeff interupted his flow of conversation as I finished the second desert to ask, "Say, aren't you eating a lot more these days? You doing some extra exercising or something?"

"Why, no," I said, "Just hungry, that's all."

He nodded. We finished shortly after that and paid the bill. Jeff stopped for a moment to congratulate the waiters on their service and we all went on to the theater.

LAURA, Jeff and Kate all loved the theater; they had all rotated into acting companies at least once in the past, and Kate had stayed for several years before she got tired of it. I liked the theater well enough, but not enough to work at it. The Porter Playhouse was jammed with people when we arrived. Many of them we knew, and there was much calling and waving and jesting as we slowly went to our seats.

The play started, and the audience fell silent to watch the players. Almost immediately my mind began to wander; this was the first opportunity I had had to sit quietly and think about what had happened. It seemed strange that I couldn't maintain my interest in *The Importance of Being Ernest;* I had always been able to do so during the

many times I had seen it in the past. It was with a calm mind that I tried to review the possible reasons for the extra flesh around my middle.

There could be only one answer: my metabolism was upset. If that were true, then I knew that I should immediately call on a doctor for an analysis and an easing of tensions. Yet for the first time I found myself suspicious of doctors and their therapy. I knew I had no grounds for suspicion whatever; they were good men doing their job, just like everybody else.

SHORTLY after I had seated myself in the theater I had noticed a tiny sensation in my lower abdomen. I ignored it until it grew more intense and then I focused my attention on it. I was completely baffled by it. I placed my hand over the area and discovered that it was coming from inside me. You can well imagine my shock at that discovery. I felt perspiration break out over my entire body; then my fears were intensified by the thought that someone might notice the perspiration. Fortunately we sat in the darkness. I struggled with the realization that the sensation I felt was pain —that I was feeling pain without an injury—that I was experiencing a sensation that no normal man had experienced for two hundred years.

To keep control of myself, I resolutely forced my thoughts back to the play. I heard Lady Bracknell ask Algernon if he felt well. The audience laughed at the obsolete question, but I did not laugh. I think it was then that I fully realized what was happening to me. I was like the men of long ago before—forgive me—sickness and disease were conquered. I was a throwback to the days when men were subject to the general adaptation syndrome which produced the stress that produced disease. All this I realized in a sudden intuitive burst; and realizing it, I saw my only hope was psychotherapy. I could not continue to be an anomaly in a modern world—the one rotten apple in a barrel. I would seek therapy; with that resolution I relaxed completely and the perspiration disappeared.

But I still could not follow the play. Instead I found myself doing something I had never done before. I watched the audience. I saw people of all sizes. For the first time I saw the individual differences in them. Some had black hair, some brown, some blond, and some little or none. Some were taller than others, or broader in shoulder or hip. Some were slight and some were husky. But they all sat with head held high; they all moved with effortless grace. All were lean, according to the leanness allowed them by their bone structure; there

was not an ounce of excess fat in the theater, save mine.

THEIR EYES looked levelly out at the world with a spark of high intelligence and assurance and contentedness. This was the human race—fine, strong, and compassionate. This was mankind which had succeeded in freeing itself of the muck and turmoil from which it had spawned. As I thought of these magnificent people, an icy regret clamped on my chest; I was not one of them.

The play went on, unfolding the problems of long dead people to the delight of the onlookers. There was not a trace of superiority in the laughter; it was a sincere recognition that these things once happened to people, and that such happenings were funny. The laughter contained compassion, nothing else.

The play came to an end and we all stood and applauded the players for a fine performance. We slowly worked our way out of the theater and took a car to the *Hi-Ho Club* for dancing.

II

SHORTLY after we settled down at our table several people stopped by to say hello, a physician doctor among them. He introduced himself as Doctor Anders, and casually sat down for a moment. Despite my previous intent to visit a doctor the following day, I felt my hackles rise at his presence. Yet something else happened to me, too. I was able for the first time that evening to present a completely normal manner under close scrutiny. I sat at that table, knowing that I was in the presence of someone who would change me, but I never felt calmer or more certain of my right to deceive him or my fellow men. And when he finally returned to his own table, I was actually disappointed. In any case, I then joined in the dancing with new-found confidence.

But I must tell you of one other thing I noticed that evening. I tell it because it was the beginning of a new relationship for me, and because it exerted profound influence on my later activities. It was simply this: I looked at my wife.

I venture to say that you who read this can not tell me what is the color of your wife's eyes. I know I could not, prior to that evening. But when I began looking at Laura very carefully, I noticed that her eyes were green—a rich intense green such as you see in an emerald held in the half-light. I saw her eyebrows, slanting up over her widely-spaced eyes. The nose, small and straight, the mouth, wide and full, the hair long and black and falling in undulating waves about her shoul-

ders. When Laura danced with Jeff, I watched the easy flow of her body. Her shoulders were wide and sloped slightly and there were two dimples placed high and out where the arms joined the shoulders. The watching of her brought a tightness to my throat that I never felt before; as she and the other people danced I realized with a rush of pride that Laura was far and away the most beautiful woman there. And I realized something else: No one else knew it.

The rest of the evening passed uneventfully. My ability to conceal my feelings from the others made it possible for me to enjoy myself. And when Laura and I got home at last we did not immediately go to sleep. And though she commented on my trembling hands, she soon forgot them and did not mention them again.

THE NEXT morning I went to the plant as usual. Sometime during the previous night, I completely lost the desire to visit a doctor. I knew I was—forgive me—sick, but I somehow had the feeling that I would rather be sick than well. And so I went to the plant just as I always had done.

I took the stairs to the level where I inspected. I was the first to arrive; not another one of my colleagues had yet come in. I sat down, got out the data sheets, clipped them on the clipboard and hung it at my waist. I checked over the robotic reports made in my absence; nothing was out of the ordinary, so I went to make my rounds.

There was no discomfort that morning; the gnawing in my stomach had stopped and the turmoil in my mind had cleared away. I felt particularly calm as I started to move around through the equipment. I climbed into mazes of the gleaming pipelines that carried chemical products from this section, where they were synthesized, to the next section—where they were polymerized into the molding powders used to make so many of the things we need nowadays.

MORE THAN ever before, I marveled at the control equipment which made it unnecessary for men to lift a hand. For the first time, I realized that if everyone on Earth were to die suddenly this planet would continue to operate efficiently for many weeks, sucking up its raw materials from the growing vats, distributing molding powers to the injection and extrusion molding machine in the next block.

I came to a fractionating tower that reached hundreds of feet into the air and looked up at it. When I checked the temperature distribution in-

side, it was perfect, as always. I checked the monstrous pumps that delivered cooling water to the heat exchangers; all in order. For a short moment I stood still and considered the vast amount of water needed to cool down the products of that tower. It was a shame with water in such short supply all these years. But there was nothing to be done about it; we had to have the formaldehyde that this tower and others like it produced. I moved on.

The next thing to check over was a fluidized reactor whose hot interior seized on a chemical made nearby, broke it down, and transformed it into the things resins are made of. Even through the thick insulation that mantled it I could feel the gentle waves of heat that came off.

I chuckled ruefully and shook my head. Here was a piece of equipment that hungrily gobbled up all the heat we could supply while twenty feet away stood a tower that required precious cooling water so it could spit out unwanted heat. Too much heat here, not enough heat there; it was a shame that those two pieces of equipment couldn't get together. I turned to move on and then I had it.

I SPUN BACK, and ran over between the tower and the reactor. There was plenty of room. I got out my charts, picked off the information I wanted, and made a simple heat balance. Immediately I saw that most of the water could be saved by hooking up the tower and the reactor in a heat exchange relationship.

A chute took me down to the shops where parts were made. The computer was in robotic operation when I arrived, so I had to wait a few minutes before I tackled my own problem. Never had I felt as I did then; a new kind of excitement made me pace up and down in front of the computer while it ground out the work. I flung off my robe to give myself more physical freedom, and I think that never before had those shops seen a half-naked man stamping back and forth.

When the computer finished its own problem at last, I fed it mine. I punched out the information I had and asked it some questions. It supplied the answers at once: My proposed change was feasible, and would save thirty gallons of water a minute. I fed the computer instructions to carry out the change, watched it call up the robots and feed a tape into each. Since I knew several hours would be required to make the change, I left the shops and continued on my rounds. And I must say this: Never before had I experienced such a complete sense of satisfaction, of accomplishment. I had done well, I knew; I had re-

duced consumption of precious water.

I RAN INTO George Hym on the eighteenth floor where I usually see him. He was a heavily-built man with black eyes and a shock of bright grey hair. Our paths often crossed there while each of us made our rounds. Not only did I tell him what I had done but I insisted on dragging him down to show him.

"Here's where it will be installed," I told him, pointing to where several robots were setting up equipment.

"Yes," he said. "I see. There seems ample room."

"Well," I said. "What do you think of it?"

"Think of it? It will save water—not a great deal of water, but any amount is all to the good."

"Yes, I know. But I mean what do you think of the change itself? I mean—I thought of it, and no one else ever has."

"Yes, I know; as I say, it will save some water. Well, I must continue on, Chris. See you later."

I waved him off and stood staring at the busy robots, my feeling of elation gone. I felt beaten, crushed, yet I was not sure why. So I continued making my check of the equipment.

As I walked, the gloomy feeling lightened. And then I knew what it was that was wrong: I had wanted George Hym to tell me that I had done a good thing. After all, both of us knew that no changes had been made in the plant for a hundred years—replacements, yes, but no changes in design or construction. I was the first, but apparently George thought nothing of it. Well, I would tell Phil Boyce.

I SOUGHT out Phil when I finished checking the twentieth floor. He had rotated into the Supervisor's job, and was coordinating the work of all the technicians. He had been inspecting the plant for a great many years, so I knew that he would be familiar with the pieces of equipment I had modified.

My heart warmed at the sight of Boyce's lean figure when I went into his office. I had always liked Phil a great deal. His light blue eyes were warm and friendly and they crinkled at the corners. "Hello, Chris. Everything all right?"

I nodded. "Certainly is, Phil. I wanted to tell you about something I did today." And I described the change I had made.

He nodded and said, "Yes, Chris. I understand." He was silent for a moment, then added, "It will save water."

I looked at him and saw there was to be nothing else, so I turned to go—but then faced him again. "Phil, why

is it no one has thought of this before?"

"I don't know."

"But we've had an increasing water shortage for fifty years, and this change I've made is a simple thing once you see it. Why has no one else done it in all these years?"

"I don't know, Chris; why haven't you done it before now?"

I stared at him and shook my head and walked out.

My rounds were completed, so I decided to leave the plant. I dialed a car; but instead of going home, I set out for the country—out to where the trees and grass grew in profusion. I did not get out of the car until it reached the very end of the line, where there were few people.

ONCE OUT, I stalked aimlessly through the trees, trying to resolve in my own mind just what it was that was b o t h e r i n g me. As I walked, I felt that small sensation, that pain, in my stomach. Rubbing the spot did not help; it added to my confusion.

In an attempt to decide *why* I was in such a state, I began to try to think of what would make me feel at ease again. I tried to think of what I wanted, of what would assuage the turmoil inside me. This was hard to do; nothing I could think of seemed to help. I turned my thoughts to my work that morning, when my dissatisfaction had begun—and I was able to pinpoint at last just when it had started. It was when I showed George Hym the change I had made in the equipment; his reaction was the beginning of my dissatisfaction. Well, w h a t was it I wanted him to do! A little more thought, and I knew what it was. I wanted him to say that I had done something unusual; I wanted recognition. And that was the trouble with Phil Boyce, too—no recognition from him, either. Why couldn't they see that?

My steps grew longer and more rapid. I found myself walking through an area of parks and playgrounds. An occasional person was walking about slowly, or was sitting in the afternoon sun. I forced myself to slow down, lest I draw attention, and the act of slowing down started the turmoil all over again, except in a different direction. Why should I adjust my conduct to suit theirs? If I wanted to walk fast or run, why shouldn't I? The only answer was that such actions would point to inner tensions.

I SLOWED down to a stroll and watched the people. I came to an area where the grass grew velvety and thick up a beautiful slope; small gardens formed lovely designs against the rich green background of the grass. I stopped

to admire it. And as I stood there, I felt a desire to walk out on the grass and look at the little gardens from a closer view.

The thought horrified me. No one walked on the grass in a place like that; it was contrary to good maintenance. The urge grew stronger so I turned away and started walking again. I could not throw it off; that nagging pocket of perversity in the back of my mind kept telling me to walk out on the grass. I resisted, but suddenly I found myself doing it. I walked on the grass, looked at the flowers, and I felt good. But my satisfaction was short lived.

I heard a voice call out, "Just a moment, sir."

I turned and saw a woman standing on the walk I had just left. She was middle-aged and carried a shawl across her head and down over one arm. She beckoned to me and said, "If you will come here, sir, I may be able to help you."

I was amused to note that she did not walk out on the grass after me. The compulsion to do the right thing was so strong in her that she remained on the walk and tried to call me over.

I smiled at her and said, "I thank you, Madam, but I am perfectly content where I am. I wish to look at the flowers; you may go on your way now."

THE LOOK of concern in her eyes spread to her face. I knew so well what it meant; she saw a sick man in me, one whose tensions forced him to do things that were better not done. This grass was not meant to walk on, so people just did not walk on it. When one did, one was obviously sick.

As I turned away from the woman, I saw that several other people had noticed me and were coming toward us. They were walking rapidly with that sense of mild urgency of people on their way to aid a fellow man in trouble. I turned my back and walked further up the gentle slope, winding my way around the little gardens, then looked back.

A group had gathered around the woman with the shawl. As I watched, several men left the walk and started across the grass toward me. There were three of them and their nervousness at being where they shouldn't be was plainly apparent. They came toward me in single file; when they reached the side opposite the little garden I was admiring, they stopped and one of them said: "Please, sir. Won't you come with us? We can help you."

I said, "But I do not need any help; I am simply admiring the flowers. Is there anything wrong with that?" My question was a result of sheer

perversity. At first, I was amused at watching the reactions I knew so well; but I was fast getting annoyed. I must confess I was a little frightened, too; there were too many people gathering. For some reason or other, there were suddenly large numbers of people in the park.

THE THREE men circled the little garden to come around to me, so I circled it ahead of them. They stopped and looked at each other; then two went one way, and one went another, to catch me in between. I simply dropped back to the next little garden.

Four more men came up to join the first three. I turned my back on them to head up the slope, and away from there, when I saw a group of men coming down the slope to trap me. Now I was seriously concerned. A monorail edged the park on one side, and a busy walk ended it on the other. I was trying to make up my mind what to do when a hand fell on my shoulder.

I turned to see a kindly-faced older man who said to me softly, "Now it's all right, son. We'll take care of you."

I pushed his hand of my shoulder, turned and ran toward the walk, weaving around the little gardens. Two men below me broke into a run and angled across the park to cut me off. The empty place on the walk where I was heading suddenly seemed to fill with people, so I slowed down to try and think of some place else to go. As I did so, the man behind me caught up with me again and this time he grabbed an arm hard. I shook it violently but could not break loose. The two men from below came up and one caught my other arm while the other said something I couldn't understand. All I could think of was that I would soon be stretched out on a doctor's couch while he talked to me and used his drugs and reasserted the Bragencwesan System to ease away all tensions. For some inecusable reason the thought sent cold fear down my back.

I twisted and brought my knee up hard into the stomach of the man holding my left arm. He grunted, released me, and fell down. I lashed out, with my left hand tightly balled up, and struck the man holding my other arm in the face. He, too, fell down. While still off balance, I kicked at the man in front of me, and both he and I fell down. While still off balance, I kicked at the man in front of me, and both he and I fell down. I immediately jumped up and saw that I was completely surrounded by people; all the openings between the gardens were filled with people who were slowly advancing on me. One of the men at

my feet feebly waved a hand and gasped, "Please, sir, we won't harm you. Let us talk to you."

III

WHEN THE people had come to within about ten feet of me I turned and ran *through* a garden and out the other side. I heard the people gasp. This took me outside the circle of the crowd. A quick glance showed that there were fewest people in the direction of the monorail, so I ran toward it with the people streaming out after me, calling to me. This time I ran a straight line right through all the little gardens crushing the flowers under my feet. My pursuers could not bring themselves to such destruction of property so they stayed on the grass and I easily outdistanced them. When I got to the monorail, they were a hundred yards behind me but closing in rapidly on all sides. Cars were whizzing past on the monorail and I could catch an occasional startled expression on the face of an occupant as he saw me standing so close to the right-of-way. It was very clear to me that I either had to cross the monorail or be captured; there was no doubt as to what I had to do.

THE CARS flashed by at the usual two-second interval. Cars on the second monorail, going the other way, were also a two-second interval apart but out of phase with the first monorail. A constant blur of cars confronted me; I had to cross the eight foot right-of-way width under those conditions. I looked behind, and the people were getting close; and then I felt something happen emotionally. I accepted the fact that I had to cross the monorail, and with the acceptance came a cold appraisal of the best way to do it. My fears were gone.

As one car sped past, I leaped forward under the part of the first rail, immediately straightened my body and held myself rigid at the point I judged to be halfway between the two rails. I judged correctly; the cars passed on both sides of my body, missing me by an inch or two on either side. For a moment, panic started when I realized I could not bend in any direction except sideways. Slowly I did so; then, at the correct time I let my body slump to the gound, whereupon I wrenched myself into the proper position to roll clear of the cars. I was successful, although one of the cars brushed my clothing.

I climbed to my feet and looked back through the flying cars at the people on the other side. They were watching me, shaking their heads, and telling each other how sick I was. Some just stared

—and I did not blame them; to my knowledge no one had ever crossed an active monorail right-of-way before. Something inside me compelled me to smile at them, wave my hand brightly in farewell before I turned to go.

As I turned away, I saw that I was not yet out of trouble. A man and a woman on this side had seen me emerge from the right-of-way and they were hurrying toward me. Feeling somewhat nettled at not being free of pursuit, I turned and ran toward a group of low lying buildings. My running attracted several more people, and my annoyance increased.

SUDDENLY, with no knowledge of its coming, the realization of my position, and how to escape it, dawned on me. There would be people on my heels as long as I did anything abnormal; the slightest abnormal gesture would betray me and bring these helpful sympathetic people flocking to my side to carry me off to a doctor. Since it was practically impossible to be out of sight of everyone for long, I just had to stop doing these things that set me apart. I had to act like everyone else. That realization was the saving of me, not only then but many times subsequently. In fact that realization is the entire secret behind the man who disappears. You who read this, and who realize that what I will soon tell you is true, will need to follow my advice. You may perform any abnormal act you desire—and in the sight of people, too—so long as you get out of sight of the people who saw you perform the act, and then revert to normality. That is the secret of the man who disappears.

On this occassion, I used the technique for the first time. I ran to the buildings and rounded the corner. There were several people along the walk ahead of me but none saw me. Since I was momentarily out of sight of my pursuers, I immediately stopped running. I arranged my clothes, smoothed down my hair, and made myself presentable—normal. The biggest difficulty was with my breathing; my breath was coming fast, short, and loud from all the running I had done. I did the best I could, however, and strolled around a nearby corner just as half a dozen pursuers swept by. The normal thing to do would be to follow them, to see what was happening; I did.

I CAME UP with them as they were talking with the people who had noticed me. My heavy breathing went unnoticed, since some of the pursuers were panting, too.

"Did you see the running man?" asked one.

"No", said another.

"He must have turned down between the buildings."

"Yes, that must be it."

"Well, no matter; others will see that the poor fellow gets the care he needs."

"Isn't it a shame?"

"He is the first I have ever seen."

"Yes, there are very few these days."

"Well, good-by, sir."

"Good-by."

And I, too, bid a cordial goodbye to the others as we separated and went our various ways. It was the first time that the man who disappears appeared in public. There was very little clamor in the papers and on the screens that time—nothing more than a simple announcement that a sick man had run away from those who tried to help him. It wasn't until later that the papers and screens began to emphasize how a man had the ability to disappear from the midst of crowds of people, and to wonder if the man came from another planet.

I CONTINUED to stroll along the walk in the afternoon sun, thinking over what had happened. I saw that I would have to be careful about yielding to these impulses, but I also saw how to avoid capture, realizing the significance of what I had learned. These good people could not conceive of a sick man acting normally. Nor could they conceive of anyone's telling them one thing when the facts were actually different. It was very similar to my having told Laura that fumes were the cause of my weight increase. She could not believe that such was not the case.

I remembered how it had been in the olden days, according to the history books. The culture then had been so unstable that it was necessary to have a few special men called police, who did nothing but capture deviates. Even though the d e v i a t e s said things that were different from the facts, the police expected such conduct. Nowadays, there are no such things as police; people are healthy and stable and need no one to protect them. There is nothing to protect against. The very rare man who begins to regress slightly is noticed by the people around him in s t a n t l y, and immediately placed under a doctor's care to remove the tensions that lie beneath all physical and mental illness. Instead of a few police, as in the old days, a modern deviate is confronted with every other human being. Yet I knew how to avoid them all.

My breath was coming deep and easy by this time, so I began looking for a car stand. I found one finally, dialed a car, got in, and dialed my home address. On the way home I realized that I was yearning for Laura—that I

missed her very much. I wanted to put my head in her lap and tell her everything that had happened today. Yet I could not; a man's wife would be just as likely as anyone else to call a doctor at the first signs of sickness. After all, she knew what was right. And so I had to continue to conceal my thoughts from Laura. That was painful to me; I was beginning not to mind the rest of the people, but my own Laura was something else.

WHEN I WALKED in, I kissed her much harder than usual. She did not mind; she immediately set about dialing dinner while I prepared drinks. We sipped the drinks while watching the screen, and it was then that the brief announcement about the sick man who had run away appeared. It gave me a strange feeling. The pain deep in my stomach returned, and did not disappear until we ate dinner; then it went away entirely. I ate two complete dinners.

After dinner, Laura and I settled hand in hand to watch the screen. There were some amusing old time films scheduled, with such fine comedians as Danny Kaye and Victor Borge.

After we had watched the first, I began cautiously to describe to Laura what I had done at the plant that morning. Her reaction was what I was afraid it would be. "That's nice, dear," she said.

"L a u r a," I said. "Why hasn't someone else thought of doing that?"

"I don't know."

"All these years, and I happen to be the first one to make a beneficial change in the plant equipment. Don't you think that's strange?"

"No. Why should it be strange?"

"I don't know. Also, why is it that no one thinks much of it, when it has not been done before? It was a completely new change yet everybody treats it as though I had done nothing at all."

Laura turned to look at me, without saying anything, so I immediately smiled at her and leaned over and kissed her. She turned back to watch the screen, and I sat back and decided to keep my mouth shut.

FOR SEVERAL days, my work and my home life proceeded uneventully. I felt no urge to do abnormal things. And then one morning in the shower, while I was being sponged down, I found something disconcerting: The layer of fat around my middle was growing larger. I examined it carefully, and there was no doubt that it was expanding.

I felt a cold fear settle over me. Here was something I could not control. Yet, if it got much worse, people on

the street—or at work, or anywhere—would notice it and immediately have me off to a doctor. Fat shows stress. There was no way to hide it, and I could not talk people out of noticing it. I turned off the shower, convinced that I was now doomed, that it would be merely a matter of time before people caught me.

As I dried myself, I thought that there must be something I could do. After all, something must be causing the excess weight; I could find out what it was, I might be able to do something about it. A titillating little thought flitted through the back of my mind, but I couldn't pull it out.

But as I pulled on my shoes it came to me. It was a remark that Jeff Drawson had made at dinner one night—something about eating a lot and exercising. Then I remembered that as one exercising any more than usual, but I was eating a great deal more. Could the eating have anything to do with my weight? It seemed logical enough. Lack of eating would surely cause loss of weight. Why would not overeating cause an increase in weight, particularly in an abnormal person?

FOR BREAKFAST that morning, I had a soft boiled egg and a cup of coffee. For lunch, I had a chop and half portions of vegetables. For dinner I had a slice of lamb and half portions of vegetables. My aim was to eat just half the amounts of the meals I had eaten before my huge appetite came along. I stopped eating desserts entirely, since they supplied little protein.

The days went on and I saw that I got no fatter. I also noticed that every time I took a shower, Laura looked me over with the practiced eye of a wife. Before long, it was plain to see that the layer of fat around my middle was going away. When I saw that, I knew I had won completely; I could always look normal.

But it was not easy. At mealtime I would sometimes suffer from what was akin to physical pain at not being able to eat all I wanted. Nor was I aided in this by my friends. I would be forced to sit and watch them gorge themselves disgustingly, while I nibbled on my sparse fare. On one occasion I could no longer stand it.

I was with George Hym one noon, and it seemed to me he almost deliberately ordered an extra large, juicy-looking lunch; I think the mashed potatoes and gravy got me. When he was halfway through, I waited until he looked away for a moment then reached over and dumped his plate into his lap. I apologized most graciously, explaining that I had accidentally done it while reaching for the salt. It was apparent he

did not understand how it could have happened, but he had to accept my explanation. He, too, could not conceive of my stating facts that did not exist. In any case, he lost his appetite and did not continue to eat that slop in front of me.

MY WORK, in the meantime, proceeded with great personal satisfaction. I ran across at least six sets of equipment in which I was able to cross the streams in heat exchange, and save more water. Furthermore, I thought of a way to eliminate over half the operations in one of the cattle food synthesis lines; it simply occurred to me that the robot equipment was handling the raw materials for the protein-precursors in an inefficient manner. The computer in the shop couldn't handle the necessary calculations, so I went to Charles Waight, the computer technologist; he pushed it through his big machine for me. Yet, despite all the changes and improvements I made no one conceded that I was the smartest technologist they had ever had, except for the long-dead oldtimers who designed the plants in the first place, of course. But I wasn't so certain of the oldtimers' cleverness any more; I could see many flaws in their equipment.

In the meantime, the man who disappears came into prominence. I found that every so often, I felt a great deal better if I did something drastic. Sometimes my actions were planned, sometimes they were not. I well remember the very first time the public heard about the man who disappears.

IT WAS RIGHT after I had put in 36 straight hours at the plant, installing the protein precursor line. My head was fuzzy, and my stomach hurt again, so I went for a stroll. I stopped at a stadium to watch a ball game. I was seated up front, in an end seat, and was sipping a bottle of Coke. The umpire ruled, obviously in error, that the man in the green uniform was out. The crowd laughed good naturedly as they always did, but I felt an upsurge of hot, unreasoning fury. Before I could stop myself I leaped to my feet and flung the half-full bottle at the umpire. On later reflection I must confess that it was with some satisfaction that I noted that I felled him.

The crowd was aghast, but no more so than I. I recovered first and leaped into an aisle and ran around the corner. Dozens of people followed. However, once around the corner I stopped and retraced my steps at a walk, glancing back over my shoulder as if at a man who had just run past me. The pursuers thought I was a late arrival; they swept past me on their fruitless errand of mercy and, of course,

never did catch the sick man. Yet he obviously could not have escaped from the stadium without being seen. In the meantime I simply sat down, watched the game some more, and then went home.

This incident was followed by many others. There was the time I tossed those malted milks into the fan at a track meet. In each case, I used my disappearing technique; and it always worked. Many other incidents—too numerous to mention—finally gave rise to the impression that there was an alien in our midst. They still could not conceive that a modern man could be sick enough to do the things I did and, at the same time, remain unnoticed by all the normal healthy people.

I MUST ADMIT that I am not proud of these petty annoyances I brought about. I do not do them simply to annoy you; instead they serve as a safety valve for me. I look around and I see all you healthy people, so smug and so certain, and something inside me resents you. To prevent my doing something serious, I do these ridiculous, petty stunts. I found myself doing some of them before I finally gave in.

During this period, I found my relationship with my wife undergoing a change. I had always been very fond of Laura but now I discovered my fondness changing to something far more intense. I used to think of her while I was at the plant, particularly during those periods when I was not busy. I would think of Laura, and my heart beat faster, my throat choked up, and my breath shortened. I found that I was all but unable to contain myself until I reached home. Once I got home and had Laura in my arms the entire rest of the world could have been obliterated for all I cared. We ate dinner late many of those evenings.

It was also in this period that I made the discoveries that prompted this writing in the first place. I was waging a constant battle with myself to keep from eating all the food I wanted. I soon found that if I kept my mind occupied on other matters, I was better able to control the urge to eat.

I realized that most of the changes I had made at the plant involved engineering changes; I had done little to improve the processes themselves. Since there was so much to be done in engineering, I suspected that a lot could be done in chemistry, too. Yet I—like so many other people, interested mainly in technology—did not have a detailed knowledge of chemistry.

I began going to the Archives to study. This turned out to have a dual advantage. Not only did I learn chemis-

try, but I was with Laura a good deal more than usual. And both of us found that a kiss stolen behind the stacks has a little extra zip in it.

IT WAS THE protein line that I was interested in. I had modified it to some extent, but I felt I could modify it a great deal more. The robots had handled it so long that none of the people even remembered what went on. So I turned to protein chemistry —and soon found that I had to go back to the start of protein chemistry if I were to learn anything. And that's how I learned about Emil Fischer.

This man Emil Fischer was a twentieth century genius. He was probably the greatest organic chemist who ever lived—with the possible exception of Cory, who came three hundred years later. As I read about Fischer's work I became intrigued with little comments about the man himself. Pretty soon I found myself reading about his life and times, as well as his work. It was then that I found out about colitis.

Emil Fischer suffered from something called colitis. I turned to the medical microfilms and found that colitis was an inflammation of the colon. I read further, and found that the colon is a part of the large intestine, and that every human being has one. Back to Emil Fischer, I found that the man suffered quite a bit of pain in his lower abdomen. Then the connection struck me: so did I. I suffered pain in the lower abdomen. Could I possibly have colitis?

I punched up more and more medical films as I got tired of reading chemistry. I was downright astonished at all the illnesses that could strike at the old timers. I soon found that there were half a dozen things that might be behind my abdominal distress, but I could not tell which one was doing it in me.

ONE VERY important thing I learned in the very beginning of study of Emil Fischer and his work on protein: There was a name for these new and useful changes and modifications I had been making at the plant. They were called—inventions. I was surprised to learn that the word had been in common usage at one time, but that it seemed to have dropped out of the language. I was an inventor, that's what I was—and as near as I could tell, I was the only one on the face of the Earth. I did not attach much significance to that fact at first.

Knowledge breeds knowledge, and confidence breeds confidence. As I went beyond the knowledge learned at schools, I found that my beautiful chemical plant, with its hosts of efficient robots,

was not so beautiful after all. It was full of design flaws and process anomalies. I began redesigning it, section by section by section. I soon found that I needed human assistance, so George Hym and Phil Boyce began to help me. In a short time, we found that we needed more help—so we borrowed some people from a nearby plant. As fast as new people joined our crew, I put them to work in varying jobs. We soon had twenty-six persons, including myself, at work.

IT WAS ABOUT at this point that I began to grow suspicious. These twenty-five people working with me were all extremely intelligent, and one or two were better chemists than I had been originally. One or two had a better grasp or mathematics. One or two were better physicists. As a matter of fact, in one way or another, every man in the group was better than I at some specialty or other. I had only to outline what should be done and each man grasped it swiftly, and accomplished it, just as swiftly. These men all had quick bright, incisive minds; they were able specialists. They worked with each other, and with me, in a relaxed atmosphere of easy good humor and crisp efficiency. But there wasn't a spark of creativeness in the entire group.

Despite their brilliance in carrying out assigned tasks, it was I who had to supply every iota of inventiveness. When I discovered this, I simply assigned broad tasks then sat back and waited for them to come to me when they got stuck. This system worked nicely.

By this time, I was spending more time at the plant than anywhere else. I continued my studies at the Archives during a few stolen hours every day, but the rest of the time I divided between home and the plant. I had no need for a relieving outburst during this period, so the activity of the man who disappears ceased. To the papers and screens, this was further evidence that he was of extraterrestrial origin; he had simply gone home.

I SLEPT at the plant one night, after working for eighteen straight hours. It was often necessary to work that long to keep ahead of the crew. They, too, would work long hours when I told them to; but otherwise, they just put in he usual four hours and left. Anyhow, Laura was was very upset about my not returning home.

"Where have you been?" she asked as I walked in.

"At the plant," I said, going up to her and putting my arms around her and kissing her.

She tilted her head back to look up at my face and said,

"You look terrible. Dark circles under your eyes, eyes look red, cheeks sunken in. You poor thing. You need a doctor."

And with that she turned, punched the button, and dialed a doctor, while I stood there horror stricken. My muscles gathered to leap on her and stop her, but it was too late. The doctor's face appeared and I strolled over in front of it while Laura explained to him how badly I looked.

I showed him my face and said, "She's right. We had a series of breakdowns at the plant, robots and all, and it was convenient for me to stay and rectify it."

The doctor's eyes searched my face keenly. "You do look bad," he said. "You'd better come over; you may have built up some tension."

"All right, if you want me to," I said. "But I feel like nothing more than a lot of sleep." And I faked an elaborate yawn and ran my hands through my hair.

Apparently that fooled him. "Fine," he said. "Get some sleep and if you detect any tension when you wake up, give me a call."

I NODDED, smiled sleepily, and flicked off the switch. I knew that in another moment he would have noticed the perspiration gathering on my forehead; I went to the shower quickly, before Laura saw it. The driving hot water soon soothed me and eased away the schook of the narrow escape. I realized once again the terrible position I was in. Laura, my beloved, my wife, was also my worst enemy. She was in the best position of all to detect me, and I could not use my disappearing technique on her.

I finished the shower, stepped out, let the autorub dry me, and knead my tired muscles. With a great deal of satisfaction, I noted that the extra weight around my middle was completely gone. But my satisfaction fled when I noticed for the first time then that I had gone too far.

My stomach was flat and hard; my chest cage arched well above it, but I could easily see my ribs through my flesh. In fact it looked as if there were no flesh at all; the ribs seemed to lie directly beneath the skin. The pectoral muscles lay nicely across the upper quadrants and flowed up to the shoulder in a thick layer of muscle. But below that, things were definitely abnormal. I would have to eat more; that would be a nuisance because I no longer was concerned about my eating. Once I started to redesign the plant, I completely forgot about my former task of eating little. In fact I had often forgotten to eat at all. Now I could see that I would have to eat a lot of food I didn't want.

For a moment, the thought infuriated me. Why must I forever be subjecting myself to misery in order to live the life I chose? But the fury passed swiftly as it always did. I slipped on a robe and went out, and joined Laura on the divan for half an hour before I went to bed.

When the plant was half finished I found that most of my part of the work was done. I only had to put in some time each day supplying some slight amount of inventiveness to the problems that others had. As a result, I spent more time than ever in the Archives.

I CANNOT say just when it was that realization of our present day situation dawned on me. Looking back, I think I dimly felt the truth when I first read about Emil Fischer. But it wasn't until after much additional reading that the pattern crystalized in my mind.

It happened very suddenly. It was late in the afternoon; I had finished reading for the day, and was waiting to go home with Laura. I was staring out a window, wondering why Archives always smell so musty, when suddenly this other thing burst full-blown in my mind. It was just there. I knew the truth of it the instant I understood it, and I am now going to try to convince you. This will not be easy, because I am very different from you, but let me try. Let me tell you this thing gently, by describing what I did once I understood.

I went home with Laura, and we later joined Jeff and Kate Drawsons at a color symphony. I remember watching the variations in color and intensity of the light as it played on the emotions to the music of *Firebird Suite*. I smiled bitterly to myself. I was the only one in the theater who realized the significance of the fact that color symphonies were invented by Mary Greenwalt, in the city of what was then Philadelphia, back in 1918. My study in the Archives had produced many a significant fact.

AFTER Stravinsky, we watched *The Nutcracker Suite* and several other pieces, and then went out for a bite to eat. After the snack, we all went up to our place and relaxed and sipped a drink.

I started things. "I've been getting myself quite an education these days," I said.

"Bud did you learn anything?" Jeff asked.

I chuckled. His point was shrewder than he knew, but I merely said, "Yes; let me tell you. I started out by looking up some chemistry and ended up by looking up men."

"Now you're talking," said Kate.

"Well, the men I looked up have been dead many, many

centuries. Anyway, all of them were geniuses."

"What's a genius, Chris?" asked Kate.

I explained and went on. "You know what I found? Every one of these men was —please excuse me—sick; every one of them had the signs that stress and tension produce. And from the way history reads, I can't even begin to guess at the headaches, stomach aches, and multitude of smaller ills that plagued those men and their contemporaries."

Laura said, "Of course, Chris; if you go back far enough, you'll reach a period before doctors understood what illness is. Everybody was ill, then; why—people even destroyed one another in those days."

I nodded. "I know. Then Henry Bragencwesan proved that stress lay at the root of all disease. With that as a starter, he went on to develop drugs and a system for eliminating stress in people. That's why we have no disease any more; everyone is perfectly adjusted. The Bragencwesan System workes perfectly, and our doctors use it whenever necessary."

Jeff said. "It's a good thing."

"That's what I'm worried about. Look here. These geniuses I mentioned are the very great men of science of our past. They brought men a long way. Yet they, like all their fellows, were sick." I rose from the chair to start pacing back and forth as I talked, a recently-acquired habit that I found helpful in thinking over problems. But just as I started, I saw the eyes of my listeners fastened to me; I could never show excitement by pacing back and forth in front of them. So, once out of the chair, I simply swung around and headed for the bathroom feeling like a complete fool.

IV

WHEN I GOT out they were talking about something else and I had to wait for a chance to start all over again on Doctor Bragencwesan and his system for eliminating stress. I reminded them that all the oldtime geniuses were sick, and I named them.

"Look at Copernicus. He was seized with what they called apoplexy. He was paralyzed, and finally died completely unaware of his condition. Or Kepler. He had smallpox at the age of four. The rest of his life, his hands were crippled and his eyes were very bad."

Laura interrupted, "I know those names from school. They really were famous men, but I did not know they were all sick."

I smiled at her. "That's not all. Isaac Newton was an insomniac; he couldn't sleep.

The last few years of his life he suffered from a nervous disorder of some kind. Galileo, there's another. Sick and infirm when they put him up for trial, he died later in a raging fever. Leonardo da Vinci had a paralyzed left hand in his later years. Mendel was a great big fat man; his overeating shows the stress and tension he lived under. Leibnitz died enfeebled by disease; Fermi died of cancer; Weiner was overweight. And none of us can ever know the headaches and other miseries suffered by these men."

JEFF SAID, "I had no idea those men suffered so much. It's too bad Bragencwesan didn't live sooner."

"I'm not so sure."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," and I forced myself to lean back and look casual, "Do you realize there hasn't been a creative thought from our people since the Bragencwesan System went into general use, centuries ago?"

"Oh, come on, Chris," said Kate, and they all laughed.

I could feel fury building up and the blood suffusing my face. I wanted to hurl something against the wall. My muscles tightened, and my fingers dug into the arms of my chair. The strain of holding myself in the chair brought a thin film of perspiration to the surface of my entire body. I looked away from the three of them for a moment, shut my eyes tightly, and took a deep breath. It calmed me enough so I could muster up a smile when I turned to face them again.

I saw Laura looking at me intently. She said to me, her cool voice acting like a soothing hand on my brow, "But, darling, aren't you using an invalid syllogism in your reasoning? You are saying: All geniuses are ill; that particular man is ill; therefore he is a genius. Isn't that what you're saying?"

"No, darling, I'm not, although it does sound like it." Once again I was surprised at Laura's clean reasoning. "What I'm saying is that I wonder if illness is one of the symptons of genius. No illness, no chance of genius. You certainly could have illness without genius, though; in ancient times, many sick people were not geniuses. But maybe in eliminating illness, we have wiped out the possibility for c r e a t i v e thought. Maybe stress in human beings is essential for the creative thinking that constitutes genius."

I HAD BEEN speaking to Laura, but it was Jeff who nodded slowly and said, "I see what you mean. But you remember from our schoolwork how carefully the scientists studied the results of the Bragencwesan S y s t e m.

They spent fifty years going over it. Not only did it not impair intelligence, but it actually increased it. With stress gone, the average intelligence rose way up; it's a proved fact that modern intelligence is far higher than it was five hundred years ago."

"Nice going, Jeff," I said. "you've put your finger on the nub; you are right. But creative thought and intelligence are not necessarily related. With our higher intelligence, we can use the work of past geniuses even better than they could. But we can not create anything ourselves." I leaned forward. "Do you realize, Jeff, that no one on Earth has done anything original or creative for three hundred years."

"No," said Jeff shaking his head. "I didn't realize it. Are you certain it's true?"

"Yes. And another thing. Do you know what the word 'invention' means?"

"No. Never heard of it."

"It means to fabricate mentally, to create or devise in the imagination. It is a word that was once common in everyday language. But it's gone now—hasn't been used in centuries. No use for it any more because there isn't any creation."

JEFF RAISED his eyebrows and wrinkled his forehead but he didn't say a word.

Kate said, "If this is the way it is, how has it happened?"

"I don't know," I said. "I can only guess. We eliminated stress. With it went disease, and lying—another word you don't know—and selfishness. With it went everything that men considered evil, and we were left with an even higher intelligence. Yet stress, which produces these evil things, also produces the creative urge. It's the old story: You never gain anything but what you don't lose something."

We all fell quiet. I was surprised at the somber reflective reception of my statements. I had spoken lightly, so they would not see how deeply I felt; nor did I want them to realize that I was one of the ill people I described, capable of lying, cheating, injuring my fellow man—and creating.

Then came the question I had been half-dreading. Jeff asked it. "What is to be done about it?"

I sat back in my chair and said as lightly as I could, "Why, throw out most of the Bragencwesan System. Retain only that portion necessary to eliminate actual mental disease, like schizophrenia or dementia praecox. Let men become subject to stress again. Let disease kill some of them; let wars break out again; let people become foolish self-centered crea-

tures. Only then can we continue to advance and achieve peace within ourselves naturally much, much, later on. Otherwise we remain stagnant where we are." And I laughed, quite loudly.

JEFF AND Kate laughed with me, but Laura did not. She sat and looked at me, and I felt the familiar coldness of fear along my spine. "Well," I said, slapping my hands on my knees. "So much for that. How about a drink?"

They all agreed and we talked in normal fashion for another hour or so. Then the Drawsons went home.

As soon as they had gone, Laura came over to me, put her hands on each side of my head, and looked into my face.

"Chris," she said, "are you all right?"

I slipped my arms around her waist and pulled her close to me, and said, "Certainly, darling."

She leaned back more so she could continue to look up at my face. "Chris, you have been telling me about the work you are doing at the plant. You are changing things, rebuilding it. Chris, you told me that you make —i n v e n t i o n s—every day there. And from the way you talked this evening you believe that people can't make inventions unless they are sick Is that right, Chris? Are you sick?"

She had said it, the thing I dreaded, and the words struck deep into me. My Laura, looking into my face, her beautiful green eyes widened in concern, her soft hands holding my face, asked me if I were sick. I could not lie to her; for the life of me I could not have lied to her then. I smiled at her and leaned forward and kissed the end of her nose.

"My darling," I said. "You weren't listening to me. It is not I who am sick; it is everyone else. Everyone in this lovely world of ours is afflicted with a sickness—a 'healthy' s i c k n e s s. Stress gone, creativeness gone, they are nothing more than intelligent vegetables."

SHE SHOOK her head and gently p u l l e d herself away. "You'll have to see a doctor right away, dear. He will cure you."

"But, my darling, I don't want to see a doctor."

"But you must; you're not well. You're like a person in one of the plays, or one of those poor people we see on the screens. I'll call the doctor now."

I listened to her words numbly. It would seem as though my career as a real man was about over. I could not bring myself to deceive Laura, nor could I leave her. Yet there was something here, something to be done. I felt the numbness leave and

my mind flashed back over the things just said. I was like a person in a play, she'd said; that was the clue.

"Wait," I said, and stepped over to Laura and gently took her hand. "I just thought of something. Darling, I want to tell you something else but I have to go to the Archives first; I want to be certain of my information. Will you wait until I get back?"

"Yes, dear," she said.

Without even kissing her I turned and fled.

I dialed a monocar and in a few moments was at the Archives. My work inside did not take as long as I had thought. My hunch was right—so right that the very information I wanted was emphasized in the microfilms I looked at. So in half an hour I was back at the apartment. I think I ran in.

I HUGGED Laura, and was not deterred by the sympathy in her face. "Listen." I started to pace back and forth. "Earlier tonight, I told you about scientists who were men of genius and sick at the same time, and I pointed out that we don't have such men any more. Now listen to this."

I stopped pacing and faced her. "Exactly the same thing is true in your fields, the arts. Painters, poets and writers, all through the years have been sick men. As a matter of fact, artists of all kinds were looked upon as crackpots even by their contemporaries; artists were sicker than most. Look here."

I took out the notes I had made. "Gauguin was rotted with disease and half mad when he died. Milton was blind. Renoir had gout and a paralyzed hand; he strapped his paint brushes to his arm. Van Gogh was insane—he cut off his ear and mailed it to a friend; he finally committed suicide. Oscar Wilde was a convicted homosexual; Poe was an alcoholic; Hemingway was overweight.

"And the records are incomplete. Again we don't know of the everyday pains, aches, and headaches that these geniuses suffered from. *But,* darling, don't you see? We *must* have stress, and all the vivacious penalties that go with it, if we are to be creative."

Laura stood silently, apparently thinking. Every so often she looked up at me and then down at the floor again. She was thinking it over, as the Drawsons had done. And it was then that I realized that the Bragencwesan System brought intelligence to a higher lever, and it put emotions aside, so a person could consider the pros and cons with an unfettered mind. I saw that it would be possible to win converts to my side if I only had the opportunity to explain it thoroughly before being hauled off to a doctor.

LAURA SAID, "There is not enough evidence, dear. You make a convincing case, but it isn't enough."

I looked at her. "But honey, you should see what it means from what I've told you. Can't you—?"

"No, Chris; it's not enough to prove anything. Now let me call the doctor." And she moved over to the commset.

I felt as though my heart had turned to stone. More evidence, she said; she had all the evidence, everything. Everything except one set of facts.

"Laura... I am the man who disappears."

She spun around to face me. "You!"

"Yes, my darling," And I told her all about it. She heard me out in wide-eyed astonishment, shaking her head in surprise. As I told her about some of the things I had done, as the man who disappears, I found myself chuckling despite the gravity of the situation. It sounded absurd but I must confess it also sounded like fun.

And I know now I'm right. Men have been stripped of their creative ability, and I'm going to see that they get it back. It may be that men will have to go back to fighting wars again; I hope we need not go that far. But that pesky, irritable, selfish, side of man's nature contains the germ of creativeness, and he must have it to advance. But I know I'm right, and I know I'm going to be successful in destroying most of the work of Bragencwesan I know it now.

Laura heard me out. She thought it over. However, the fact that I was the man who disappears did not seem to matter. She reached for the switch to call a doctor, but her hand never touched the switch.

Instead she suddenly pressed the palms of both hands against her temples. My Laura, my beautiful, green-eyed, passionate Laura, suddenly developed a splitting headache.

★

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

Editorial

NOT BOTH WAYS

THE APPEARANCE of damon knight's collection of critical essays, *"In Search of Wonder"* (Advent Publishers, 3508 N. Sheffield, Chicago 13, Ill. 165 well-filled pages of text, plus extensive bibliography and index. $4.00) has brought forth a great deal of discussion on the nature and purposes of science fiction criticism, and has revived the old chestnut about the "destructive" critic.

As an occasional writer myself, the recipient of various kinds of comment on my own stories, I can sympathize with the author who reads condemnation of his efforts—whether it be dismissal in toto as worthless, thumbs down on particular works, or lambasting various aspects of particular works. Criticism can be painful to the author; it can be painful to the fan who feels that a particular writer is very fine indeed. And adverse judgement *can* be "destructive" if it consists of misrepresentation.

It was painful, for example, when one reviewer stated that my novel, *"Mystery of the Third Mine"* had poor characterization, and when another felt that the story was "so obscured by legal and logistic complexities that the reader never gets a chance to work up interest in the story." However, the former is acceptable as an opinion on the part of one reviewer (difficult to debate, since there was no analysis but only the flat statement), and the latter complaint has some basis in that the story does contain legal and logistic complications. Very possibly it was all too much for some readers. Nonethe less, that hurt; I sweated

trying to work out vivid characterizations, and trying to work the complications in so that the story was enhanced, and suspense heightened by them. However blase a writer may appear to be, I don't think anyone who has made an honest effort is going to feel anything but sorrowful when his work is thus dismissed. It makes no difference that all the other reviews were favorable; the unfavorable notices somehow seem to drown out all the praise. The author tries to assure himself that the offending reviewer (in this case, they were reviewers as there was no detailed examination) is stupid, or lazy, or really hates science fiction, etc.—but down underneath there's the nagging question of whether the detractor may not be right. And up on top there's the equally nagging wonder of whether the slam will hurt sales.

UNPLEASANT as this is, what makes a writer really frumious—to borrow one of Lewis Carroll's wonderful synthetic adjectives—is the notice that misquotes and/or misrepresents. I was sad at the two reviews mentioned above, but I was outraged at the review which summarized the novel as, "Space frontiersmen leave Martian homes for the Asteroids." Wouldn't you think, from this, that the story was about an emigration from Mars to the Asteroid Belt? I know I would, if I hadn't read the story. Well...it isn't about that at all; the "leaving Martian homes" was just about all in the background.

And I've been equally saddened or outraged when I've read notices about other writers' books and stories I thought excellent, which did unto them as was done unto me.

This kind of feeling in general is well expressed in a letter received recently:

> Dear Editor:
> I am just one of many thousands of science fiction readers who read the stuff for pleasure and enjoyment. Now and then I'll admit that a story makes me think and wonder a bit—in fact, that's the kind of stories I like best. Once in a while a friend or acquaintance will ask me why I read this crazy stuff and when he does, I just say "It's fun to read." No long explanations, no lectures about how this is the literature of the future coming in ahead of its time, or how science fiction predicted all kinds of things before even the Russians thought of them.
> I refuse to argue about

it. Now and then some wisenheimer w a n t s to convert me to the finer things in life by showing me how I'm wasting precious time with all this nonsense, or untangle my ego by *explaining* how it's all s o m e kind of Freudian manifestation, but I refuse to listen. I tell him I'm just plain narrow-minded, and content to be so; I'm *not* going to argue because even if he's right, I don't give a hang. We all have our pet foibles, and if he believes in fresh air and exercize, why doesn't he trade in his power motor for a good oldfashioned, muscle-building, satisfaction bringing lawnmower, or cut up his firewood with an ordinary axe and saw, instead of wasting precious time following a silly little ball around the golf links? Sometimes that shuts 'em up, let me tell you.

So now you want to know what I'm complaining about, huh? I'll tell you. I'm registering a whangding d o u b l e-barrelled p r o t e s t against these smart-aleck "critics" who go around dissecting science fiction as if it was literature. So it's their pet foible; okay, I have no complaint if they keep it to themselves or confine it to amateur magazines circulated among people like them. But when the regular magazines start publishing t h i s nonsense, that's something else.

Damn it all, who cares if "World Of Null-A" is full of inconsistencies and stuff? If I want logic I'll read Aristotle or St. Thomas Acquinas. If I want to read literary criticism—and I do sometimes—I read criticism about authors and stories where the main question is literature, and not just plain fun of a whacky, intellectual kind, like you find in science fiction. Hell, I can wax literary, too—a m u r r a i n upon these "critics" of science fiction!

And who cares whether Dr. Keller's 20 foot termites are impossible? Like the van Vogt story, "The Human Termites" kept me interested and downright sulky when I had to put the story down before f i n i s h i n g it. That's what I want—a story that holds me from beginning to end. Sure, there ought to be good writing, there ought to be people that seem vivid to you. I almost said "real", but then I remembered Conan. Hell, I never believed in Conan for one second, and I always knew that he'd hack his

way out of anything thrown at him. But just the same. I got a kick out of seeing him do it, and sometimes the predicaments were sort of scary, too. Nope, I don't believe in magic and sorcerors and ancient evil from the stars, but I can imagine. Just suppose I did come up against something like this. I'm no Conan—it'd sure be goshawful.

So what I want to say to damon knight and Dr. Macklin, and all the rest, is just this: All right, you fellows are very perceptive, and no doubt you're right about most of what you say is wrong or impossible in science fiction. But kindly, my dear pestiferous nuisances, confine these post mortems to yourselves and *stop spoiling my fun!*

Outraged Reader

PS: What do you have to say to that, Mr. Editor?

THERE'S quite a bit to be said, Outraged Reader, because you've put your case very convincingly.

1. You, and everyone else, have a perfect right to look at science fiction in this way.

2. Given your viewpoint, your attitude toward serious science fiction criticism is perfectly sound.

3. However, everyone doesn't accept your viewpoint. Many people think that science fiction ought to be treated as serious literature.

4. You, and everyone else, can have it either way. You can decide that science fiction is just plain fun, fundamentally should not be serious writing, and Outraged Readers' conclusion follows. Or you can claim that science fiction *is* (or ought to be considered) a serious branch of literature, worthy of attention as such. Then the knight-Macklin line of reasoning follows. *But you can't have it both ways!*

5. The dissections of critics like knight, and the points I've been making in editorials, serve to underline the *necessary results* of taking science fiction seriously. Anyone who *wants* science fiction to be taken seriously must endure merciless examination of its present state, and re-examination of its past. I, Lowndes, wrote a novel. Now if the most important thing to me was that *"Mystery of the Third Mine"* be accepted as a first-class work, then I'd have taken care that only people who could be relied upon to like it would see it. However, desirous of dough, I sold it to a

publisher who put it on general sale; thereby it came under the examination of all kinds of reviewers and critics. I *hoped* that it would be proclaimed good—but in order to attain such a goal, I had to take the risk of its being ripped to shreds, or dismissed as not worth bothering about.

I couldn't hope to get the kind of praise that had any meaning if I played safe and just showed the story to people whose approval was virtually guaranteed in advance.

TAKING the safe attitude that you do, Outraged Reader, protects your fun. And that's fine—for you and everyone else who has no ambition in respect to science fiction; either the ambition of the author and producer, or the ambition of the supporter who wants to be admired for his adherence to something admirable. Again, there's nothing wrong or stupid about taking this attitude; in some ways, it's far more sensible than the ambitious one.

Ambition, however, must needs be made of sterner stuff. The person who tries to put up an argument when someone asks why he reads that "crazy stuff"—who wants to convince questioners not only that science fiction isn't "crazy" stuff, but really is very well worthwhile stuff—has renounced your viewpoint. The trouble is, irrational as so many of us are, too many of the ambitious want to fall back on to your position, Outraged Reader, when the going gets rough. They sound off about how great science fiction is, and join mutual-admiration societies to celebrate its greatness—but the moment serious examination begins to uncover the numerous flaws to be found in science fiction, the ambitions fans start weeping and wailing about "destructive criticism", and sobbing about critics spoiling their fun.

MUST IT be all one or the other? No, of course not. Almost any well-balanced person has some low tastes. Now I've made it clear, I hope, that I'm in the camp of the ambitious when it comes to science fiction. But does that mean that I can't enjoy "World of Null A" or "The Human Termites"? Of course not. Let me state unequivocally: *I got a big kick out of "World of Null A", "The Human Termites", and others of that ilk, but I have no illusions about them. I do not list them as examples of great, or even good, science fiction.* Further, I not only read and enjoy, but try to learn from

[*Turn To Page* 68]

★ NEUTRAL PLANET ★

by Robert Silverberg

Both Rigel and Earth wanted the friendship of this planet, and whoever could make a treaty with the natives first would have it. But the natives had something to say about the matter — and they said ***No!*** *to both sides, with equal vehemence!*

FROM THE fore viewing bay of the Terran starship *Peccable*, the twin planets Fasolt and Fafnir had become visible—uninhabited Fasolt a violet ball the size of a quarter-credit piece dead ahead, and Fafnir, home of the gnorphs, a bright red dot far too the right, beyond the mighty curve of the big ship's outsweeping wing.

The nameless, tiny blue sun about which both worlds orbited rode high above them, at a sharp 36° off the ecliptic. And, majestic in its vastness, great Antares served as a hugh bright-red backdrop for the entire scene.

"Fasolt dead ahead," came the word from Navigation. "Prepare for decelerating orbit."

The eighteen men who comprised the Terran mission to the gnorphs of Fafnir moved rapidly and smoothly toward their landing stations. This was a functioning team; they had a big job, and they were ready for it.

In Control Cabin, Shipmaster Deev Harskin was strapping himself into the acceleration cradle when the voice of Observer First Rank Snollgren broke in. "Chief? Snollgren. Read me?" "Go ahead, boy. What's up?"

"That Rigellian ship—the one we saw yesterday? I just found it again. Ten light-seconds off starboard, and credits to crawfish it's orbiting in on Fasolt!"

HARSKIN gripped the side of the cradle anxiously. "You sure it's not Fafnir they're heading for? How's your depth-perception out there?"

"A-one. That boat's going the same place we are, Chief!"

Sighing, Harskin said, "It could have been worse, I guess." He snapped on the all-ship communicator and said, "Gentlemen, our job has been complicated somewhat. Observer Snollgren reports a

Neutral Planet

by Robert Silverberg

(author of "Solitary")

The natives were not impressed.

illustration by FREAS

Rigellian ship orbiting in on Fasolt, and it looks likely they have the same idea we have. Well, this'll be a test of our mettle. We'll have a chance to snatch Fafnir right from under their alleged noses!"

A voice said, "Why not blast the Rigellians first? They're our enemies, aren't they?"

Harskin recognized the voice as belonging to Leefman—a first-rate linquist, somewhat innocent of the niceties of Interstellar protocol. No reply from Harskin was needed. The hoarse voice of Military Attache Ramos broke in. "This is a neutral system, Leefman. Rigellian-Terran hostilities are suspended pending contact with the gnorphs. Someday you'll understand that war has its code, too."

Alone in Control Cabin, Shipmaster Haskin smiled. It was a good crew; a little overspecialized, perhaps, but more than adequate for the purpose. Having Rigellians on hand would be just so much additional challenge. Shipmaster Harskin enjoyed challenges.

Beneath him, the engines of the *Peccable* throbbed magnificently. He was proud of his crew. The *Peccable* swept into the deadly atmosphere of Fasolt, swung downward in big looping spirals, and headed for land.

Not too far behind came the Rigellians. Harskin leaned back and let the crash of deceleration eddy up over him, and waited.

FASOLT was mostly rock, except for the hydrogen-fluoride oceans and the hydrogenous air. It was not an appealing planet.

The spacesuited men of the *Peccable* were quick to debouch and extrude their dome. Atmosphere issued into it. "A little home away from home," Harskins remarked.

Biochemist Carver squinted balefully at the choppy hydrofluoric acid sea. "Nice world. Good thing these goldfish bowls aren't made out of glass, yes? And better caution your men about using the dome airlock. A little of our oxygen gets out into that atmosphere and we'll have the loveliest rainstorm you ever want to see—with us a thousand feet up, looking down."

Harskin nodded. "It's not a pleasant place at all. But it's not a pleasant war we're fighting."

He glanced up at the murky sky. Fafnir was full, a broad red globe barely a million miles away. And, completing the group, there was the faint blue sun about which both worlds revolved, the entire system forming a neat Trojan equilateral with vast Antares.

SNOLLGREN appeared. The keen-eyed Observer had been in the ship, and apparently had made it from the *Peccable* to the endomed temporary camp on a dead run, no little feat in Fasolt's 1.5 g field.

"Well?" Harskin asked.

The Observer opened his faceplate and sucked in some of the dome's high-oxygen atmosphere. "The Rigellians," he gasped. "They've landed. I saw them in orbit."

"Where?"

"I'd estimate five hundred miles westward. They're definitely on this continent."

Harskin glanced at the chronometer set in the wrist of Snollgren's spacesuit. We'll give them an hour to set up their camp. Then we'll contact them and find out what goes."

THE RIGELLIAN captain's name was Fourteen Deathless. He spoke Galactic with a sharp, crisp accent that Harskin attributed to his ursine ancestry. "Coincidence we're both here at the same time, eh, Shipmaster Harskin? Strange are the ways of the guiding Forces."

"They certainly are," Harskin said. He stared at the hand-mike, wishing it were a screen, so he could see the sly, smug expression on the Rigellian's furry face. Obviously, someone had intercepted Harskin's allegedly-secret orders and studied them carefully before forwarding them to their recipient.

Coincidences didn't happen in interstellar war; the Rigellians were here because they knew the Earthmen were.

"We have arrived at a knotty problem in ethics," remarked Captain Fourteen Deathless. "Both of us are here for the same purpose, that of negotiating trading rights with the gnorphs. Now —ah—which of us is to make the first attempt to deal with these people?"

"Obviously," said Harskin, "the ship which landed on Fasolt first has prior claim."

"This is suitable," said the Rigellian.

"We'll leave at once, then. Since the *Peccable* landed at least half an hour before your ship, we have clear priority."

"Interesting," Captain Fourteen Deathless said. "But just how do you compute that you arrived before we did? By our instruments we were down long before you."

Harskin started to sputter, then checked himself. "Impossible!"

"Oh? Cite your landing time, please, with reference to Galactic Absolute."

"We put down at—" Harskin paused. "No. Suppose *you* tell *me* what time *you* landed, and then I'll give you our figures."

"That's hardly fair," said

the Rigellian. "How do we know you won't alter your figures once we've given ours?"

"And how do *we* know, on the other hand—"

"It won't work," said the alien. "Neither of us will allow the other priority."

SHRUGGING, Harskin saw the truth was that. Regardless of the fact that the *Peccable* actually *had* landed first, the Rigellians would never admit it. It was a problem in simple relativity; without an external observer to supply impartial data, it was Fourteen Deathless' word against Harskin's. It was impossible to prove to the Rigellian that he was lying—and therefore, he wasn't lying!

"All right," Harskins said wearily. "Call it a stalemate. Suppose we *both* go to Fafnir now, and have them choose between us."

There was silence at the other end for a while. Then the Rigellian said, "This is acceptable. The rights of the neutral parties must be respected, of course."

"Of course. Until this system is settled, we're *all* neutrals, remember?"

"Naturally," agreed the Rigellian.

IT WAS NOT, thought Harskin, a totally satisfactory arrangement. Still, it could hardly be helped.

By the very strict rules with which the Terran-Rigellian "war" was being fought, a system was considered neutral until a majority of its intelligently-inhabited worlds had declared a preference for one power or the other.

In the Antares system, a majority vote would have to be a unanimous one. Of the eleven highly-variegated worlds that circled the giant red star, only Fafnir bore life. The gnorphs were an intelligent race of biped humanoids—the classic shape of intelligent life. The Terrans were simianoid; the Rigellians, ursinoid. But the gnorphs owed their appearance neither to apes nor bears; they were reptilians, erect and tailless. Fafnir was not hospitable to mammalian life.

Harskins stared broodingly out the viewing bay as the blood-red seas of Fafnir grew larger. The Rigellian ship could not be seen, but he knew it was on its way. He made a mental note to inform Terran Intelligence that the secrecy of the high command's secret orders was open to some question.

IT WAS A strange war—a war fought with documents rather than energy cannons. The shooting stage of the war between the galaxy's two leading races had long since ended in sheer futility; the

development of the Martineau Negascreen, which happily drank up every megawatt of a bombardment and fired it back at triple intensity, quickly put an end to active hostility.

Now, the war was carried on at a subtler level—the economic one. Rigel and Terra strove to outdo each other in extracting exclusive trading-rights from systems, hoping to choke each other's lifelines. The universe was infinite, or close enough to infinite to keep both systems busy for quite a few millenia to come.

Harskin shrugged. Terran scouts had visited Fafnir and had reported little anxiety on the part of the gnorphs to take part in the galactic stream of things. Presumably, Rigel IV had not yet visited the world; it was simpler to pirate the Terran scout reports.

Well, this would really be a test.

"Preparing to land, sir," said Navigator Dominick. "Any instructions?"

"Yes," Harskin said. "Bring us down where it's dry."

THE LANDING was a good one, on the centermost of the island-group that made up Fafnir's main landmass. Harskin and his twelve men—he had left five behind in the dome on Fasolt to hedge his bet—left the ship.

It would not be necessary to erect a dome here; Fafnir's air was breathable, to some extent. It was 11% oxygen, 86% nitrogen, and a whooping 3% of inerts, but a decent filter system easily strained the excess nitro and argon out, and pumped in oxygen.

Wearing breathing-masks and converters, the thirteen Terrans advanced inland. At their backs was the ocean, red and glimmering in Antares' light.

"Here come the Rigellians' Observer Snollgren cried.

"As usual, they're hanging back and waiting to see what we do." Harskin frowned. "This time, we won't wait for them. Let's take advantage of our head start."

THE GNORPH village was five miles inland, but the party had not gone more than two miles when they were greeted by a group of aliens.

There were about a hundred of them, advancing in a wedge-shaped phalanx. They were moving slowly, without any overt belligerent ideas, but Harskin felt uneasy. A hundred aroused primitives could make quick work of thirteen Terrans armed only with handguns.

He glanced at Mawley, Contact Technician first class. "Go ahead. Get up there and tell 'em we're friends."

Mawley was a tall redhead with knobby cheekbones and, at the moment, an expression of grave self-concern. He nod-

ded, checked his linqual converter to make sure it was operating, and stepped forward, one hand upraised.

"Greetings," he said loudly. "We come in peace."

The gnorphs spread out into a loose formation and stared solidly ahead. Harskins, waiting tensely for Mawley to achieve his rapport with the aliens, peered curiously at them.

They were short—five-six or so—and correspondingly broad-beamed. Their chocolate-brown skin was glossy and scaled; it hung loosely, in corrugated folds. Thick antennae twined upward from either side of their bald heads, and equally thick fleshy processes dangled comblike from their jaws. As for their eyes, Harskin was unable to see them; they were hidden in deep shadow, set back two inches in their skull and protected by projecting, brooding rims of bone that circled completely around each eye. They were not attractive beings.

THREE OF the gnorphs stepped out of the ranks, and the middle alien stepped forward, flanked slightly to the rear by his companions. He spoke in a harsh, guttural voice.

The converter rendered it as: "What do you want here?"

Mawley was prepared for the question. "Friendship. Peace Mutual happiness of our worlds."

"Where are you from?"

Mawley gestured to the sky. "Far away, beyond the sky. Beyond the stars. Much distance."

The gnorph looked skeptical. "How many days' sailing from here?"

"Many days. Many *many* days."

"Then why come to us?"

"To establish friendship," said Mawley. "To build a bond between your world and ours."

At that, the alien did an abrupt about-face and conferred with his two companions. Harskins kept an eye on the spears twitching in the alien hands.

The conference seemed to be prolonging itself indefinitely. Mawley glanced back at Harskin as if to ask what he should do next, but the Shipmaster merely smiled in approval and encouragement.

Finally, the aliens broke up their huddle and the lead man turned back to the Terrans. "We think you should leave us," he grunted. "Go. At once."

There was nothing in Mawley's instructions to cover this. The Contact Technician opened and closed his mouth a few times without speaking. Gravely, the aliens turned and marched away, leaving the Terrans alone.

First Contact had been achieved.

"THIS HAS to be done in a very careful way," Harskin said. "Any news from the Rigellians?"

"They're situated about eight miles from here," Snollgren said.

"Hmm. That means they're as far from the village as we are." Harskin put his hands to his head. "The gnorphs are certainly not leaping all over the place to sign a treaty with us, that's for sure. We'll have to handle them gently, or we may make them angry enough to sign up with the Rigellians."

"I doubt that," offered Sociologist Yang. "They probably won't be any more anxious to deal with the Rigellians than they are with us. They're neutrals, and they want to stay that way."

Harskin leaned back. "This is a problem we haven't hit before. None of the worlds in either sphere of influence ever had any isolationist ideas. What do we do? Just pull up and leave?"

The blue sun was setting. Antares still hovered on the horizon, a shapeless blob of pale red eating up half the sky. "We'll have to send a man to spy on the Rigellians. Archer, you're elected."

The man in question rose. "Yes, sir."

"Keep an eye on them, watch their dealings with the gnorphs, and above all don't let the Rigellians see you." Another idea occurred to the Shipmaster. "Lloyd?"

"Yes, sir?"

"In all probability the Rigellians have slapped a spy on *us*. You're our counterespionage man, effective now. Scout around and see if you can't turn up their spy."

ARCHER and Lloyd departed. Harksin turned to the Sociologist. "Yang, there has to be some way of pushing these gnorphs to one side or the other."

"Agreed. I'll have to see more of the pattern, though, before I can help you."

Harskin nodded. "We'll make contact with the gnorphs again after Archer returns with word of what the Rigellians are up to. We'll profit by their mistakes."

ANTARES had set as far as it was going to set, which was about three-quarters of the way below the horizon, and the blue sun was spiralling its way into the heavens again, when the quiet air of Fafnir was split by an earshaking explosion.

The men of the *Peccable* were awake in an instant—those eight who had been sleeping, at any rate. A two-man skeleton team had been guarding the ship, Harskin had been meditating in Control Cabin, and Archer and Lloyd had not yet returned from their scouting missions.

Almost simultaneously with

the explosion came the clangor of the alarm-bell at the main airlock, signifying someone wanted in. A moment later, Observer First Class Snollgren was on the wire, excitedly jabbering something incoherent.

Harskin switched on the all-ship communicator and yelled, *"Stop! Whoa! Halt!"*

There was silence. He said, "Clyde, see what's going on at the airlock. Snollgren, slow down and tell me what you just saw."

"It was the Rigellian ship, sir!" the Observer said. "It just left. That was the noise we heard."

"You sure of that?"

"Double positive. It took off in one hell of a hurry and I caught it on a tangent bound out of here."

"Okay. Clyde, what's at the airlock?"

"It's Lloyd, sir. He's back, and he's got a Rigellian prisoner with him."

"Prisoner? What the—all right, have them both come up here."

Radioman Klaristenfield was next on the line. He said, "Sir, report come in from the base on Fasolt. They confirm blastoff of a ship from Fafnir. They thought it might be us."

"Tell the idiots it isn't," Harskin snapped. "And tell them to watch for the Rigellian ship. It's probably on its way back to Fasolt."

THE DOOR-annunciator chimed. Harskin pressed *admit* and Lloyd entered, preceded at blaster-point by a very angry-looking Rigellian.

"Where'd you find him?" Harskin asked.

"Mousing around near the ship," said Lloyd. The thin spaceman was pale and tense-looking. "I was patrolling the area as you suggested when I heard the explosion. I looked up and saw the Rigellian ship up overhead and heading outward. And then this guy came crashing out of the underbrush and started cursing a blue streak in Rigellian. He didn't even see me until I had the blaster pointing in his face."

Harskin glanced at the Rigellian. "What's your name and rank, Rigellian?"

"Three Ninety-Seven Indomitable," the alien said. He was a formidably burly seven-footer, covered with stiff course black hair and wearing a light yellow leather harness. His eyes glinted coldly. He looked angry. "Espionage man first order," he said.

"That explains what you were doing near our ship, then, Three Ninety-Seven Indomitable," Harskin said. "What can you tell me about this quick blastoff?"

"Not a thing. The first I knew of it was when it happened. They marooned me! They left me here!" The alien slipped from Galactic

into a Rigellian tongue and growled what must have been some highly picturesque profanity.

"They just *left* you?" Harskin repeated in amazement. "Something must have made them decide to clear out of here in an awful hurry, then." He turned to Lloyd. "Convey the prisoner to the brig and see that he's put there to stay. Then pick two men and start combing the countryside for Archer. I want to know what made the Rigellians get out of here so fast they didn't have time to pick up their spy."

AS IT DEVELOPED, very little countryside-combing was necessary to locate Archer. Harskin's spy returned to the *Peccable* about three quarters of an hour later, extremely winded after his cross-country trot. It took him five minutes to calm down sufficiently enough to deliver his report.

"I tracked the Rigellians back to their ship," he said. "They were all gathered around it, and I waited in the underbrush. After a while they proceeded to the gnorph village, and I followed them."

"Any attempt at counter-espionage?" Harskin asked.

"Yes, sir." Archer grinned uncomfortably. "I killed him."

Harskin nodded. "Go on."

"They reached the village. I stayed about thirty yards behind them and switched on my converter so I could hear what they were saying."

"Bad, but unavoidable," Harskin said. "They might have had a man at the ship tracing the energy flow. I guess they didn't though. What happened in the village?"

THEY INTRODUCED themselves, and gave the usual line—the same thing we said, about peace and friendship and stuff. Then they started handing out gifts. Captain Fourteen Deathless said this was to cement Rigel's friendship with Fafnir—only he didn't call it Fafnir, naturally.

"They handed mirrors all around, and little forcewave generators, and all sorts of trinkets and gadgets. The gnorphs took each one and stacked it in a heap off to one side. The Rigellians kept handing out more and more, and the stack kept growing. Then, finally, Fourteen Deathless said he felt the gifts had been sufficient. He started to explain the nature of the treaty. And one of the gnorphs stepped out and pointed to the stacks of gifts. 'Are you quite finished delivering things?' he asked, in a very stuffy tone. The Rigellian looked flustered and said more gifts would be forthcoming after the treaty

was signed. And that blew the roof off."

"How do you mean?"

IT HAPPENED so fast I'm not sure. But suddenly all the gnorphs started waving their spears and looking menacing, and then someone threw a spear at a Rigellian. That started it. The Rigellians had some handguns with them, but they were so close they hardly had a chance to use them. It was a real massacre. About half the Rigellians escaped, including Captain Deathless. I hid in the underbrush till it was all over. Then I came back here."

Harskin looked at Sociologst Yang. "Well? What do you make of it?"

"Obviously a greedy sort of culture," the Sociologist remarked. "The Rigellians made the mistake of being too stingy. I suggest we wait till morning and go to that village ourselves, and shoot the works. With the Rigellians gone we've got a clear field, and if we're liberal enough the planet will be ours."

"Don't be too sure of that," Harskin said broodingly. "That Rigellian was no bigger a fool than any of us. When we go to that village, we'll go well armed."

THE GNORPH village was a cluster of thatched huts set in a wide semi-circle over some extremely marshy swampland. Both Antares and the blue companion were in the sky when the Earthmen arrived; Fasolt was making its daily occultation of the giant sun.

Harskin had taken six of his men with him: Yang, Leefman Archer, Mawley, Ramos, and Carver. Six more remained at the ship, seeing to it that the *Peccable* was primed for a quick getaway, if necessary.

The gifts of the Rigellians lay in a scattered heap in the center of the village, smashed and battered. Nearby lay half a dozen mutilated Rigellian bodies. Harskin shuddered despite himself; these gnorphs were cold-blooded in more than the merely literal biological sense!

A group of them filtered out of their huts and confronted the approaching Earthmen. In the mingled blue and red light of the two suns—one hugh and dim, the other small and dim—the blank scaly faces looked strange and menacing, the bone-hooded eye-sockets cold and ugly.

"What do you want here, strangers?"

"We have come to thank you, Mawley said, "for killing our enemies, the furmen." He had been instructed to stress the distinction between the group of Rigellians and the Earthmen. "The furmen were here last night, bearing niggling gifts. They are our enemies. We of

Earth offer you peace and good will."

THE GNORPHS stared squarely at the tense little party of Earthmen. Each of the seven Terrans carried a powerful blaster set for wide-beam stunning, highly efficient if not particularly deadly as a close-range weapon. In the event of a battle, the Earthmen would at least be ready.

"What is it you want here?" the gnorph leader asked with thinly-concealed impatience.

"We wish to sign a treaty between your world and ours," said Mawley. "A bond of eternal friendship, of loyalty and fellowship between worlds."

Somewhere in the distance an unseen beast emitted a rumbling reptilian honk—quite spoiling the effect, Harskin thought.

"Friendship? Fellowship?" the gnorph repeated. Indicating by a quivering shake of his wattles that these were difficult concepts for him to grasp.

"Yes," said Mawley. "And as signs of our friendship we bring you gifts—not piddling trinkets such as our enemies foisted on you last night, but gifts of incomparable richness, gifts which will be just part of the bounty to fall upon you if you will sign with us."

AT A SIGNAL from Harskin, they began unloading the gifts they had brought with them: miniatureized cameras, game-detectors, dozen of other treasures calculated to impress the gnorphs.

And then it began.

Harskin had been on the lookout for the explosion ever since they had arrived, and when he saw the spears beginning to bristle in the gnorph ranks he yanked his blaster out and fired.

The stunning beam swept the front rank of gnorphs; they fell. The others growled menacingly and advanced.

The seven Earthmen jammed together in a unit and fired constantly; gnorphs lay unconscious all over, and still more came pouring from the huts. The Terrans started to run. Spears sailed past their heads.

It was a long, grim retreat to the ship.

THEY WERE still a quarter of a million miles from Fasolt when Radioman Klaristenfiled reported that Captain Fourteen Deathless of the Rigellian ship was calling.

"We see you have left also," the Rigellian said when Harskin took the phone. "You were evidently as unsuccessful as we."

"Not quite," Harskin said. "At least we got out of there without any casualties. I

counted six dead Rigellians outside that village—plus the man you left behind to watch over us. He's in our brig."

"Ah. I had wondered what became of him. Well, Harskin, do we declare Fafnir a neutral planet and leave it at that? It's a rather unsatisfactory finish to our little encounter."

"Agreed. But what can we do? We dumped nearly fifty thousand credits' worth of trinkets when we escaped."

"You Terrans are lavish," the Rigellian observed. "Our goods were worth but half that."

"That's the way it goes," Harskin said. "Well, best wishes, Fourteen Deathless."

"One moment! Is the decision a dual withdrawal?"

"I'm not so sure," Harskin said, and broke the contact.

WHEN THEY reached Fasolt and rejoined the men in the dome, Harskin ordered a general meeting. He had an idea.

"The aliens," he said, "offered the gnorphs twenty-five thousand credits of goods, and were repulsed angrily. We offered twice as much—and, if Archer's account of the Rigellian incident was accurate, we were repulsed about twice as fast. Yang, does that suggest anything to you?"

The little Sociologist wrinkled his head. "The pattern still is not clear," he said.

"I didn't think so." Harskin knotted his fingers in concentration. "Let me put it this way: the degree of insult the gnorphs felt varied directly with the degree of wealth offered. That sound plausible?"

Yang nodded.

"Tell me: what happens when an isolated, biologically glum race is visited by warm-blooded aliens from the skies? Suppose these warm-blooded aliens want a treaty of friendship—and offer to *pay* for it? How will the natives react, Yang?"

"I see. They'll get highly insulted. We're treating them in a cavalier fashion."

"More than that. We're obligating them to us. We're *purchasing* that treaty with our gifts. But obviously gifts are worth more than a treaty of friendship, so they feel they'll owe us something if they accept. They don't want to owe us anything. So they chase us away.

"NOW," CONTINUED Harskin, "if we reverse the situation—if we make ourselves beholden to them, and *beg* for the signing of the treaty instead of trying to *buy* a treaty—why, that gives them a chance to seem lordly." He turned to Ramos, the Military Attache. "Ramos, do you think a solar

system is worth a spaceship?"

"Eh?"

"I mean, if it becomes necessary to sacrifice our ship in order to win the Antares system, will that be a strategically sound move?"

"I imagine so," Ramos said cautiously.

Harskin flicked a bead of sweat from his forehead. "Very well, then. Mawley, you and I and Navigator Dominick are goiong to take the *Peccable* on her final cruise. Klaristenfield, I want you to get a subradio sending set inside my spacesuit, and make damned sure you don't put it where it will bother me. Snollgren, you monitor the area and keep me posted on what the Rigellians are doing, if anything."

He pointed to the Navigator. "Come up to Control Cabin, Dominic. We're going to work out the most precise orbit you'll ever need to compute."

ANTARES was sinking in the sky and the blue sun in partial eclipse. Suddenly. the *Peccable* flashed across the sky of Fafnir, trailing smoke at both jets, roaring like a wounded giant as it circled in wildly for its crash-landing.

The three men aboard were huddled in their acceleration cradles, groaning in pain as the increasing gray buffetted and bruised them. Below, Fafnir sprang up to meet the ship.

Harskin was bathed in his own sweat. So many things might have gone wrong—

They might have computed one tenth-place decimal awry —and would land square in the heart of the swampland.

The stabilizer jets might be consumed by the blaze they had set too soon, and the impact of their landing would kill them.

The airlock would refuse to open.

The gnorphs would fail to act as expected—

It was, he thought, an insane venture.

The ship throbbed suddenly as the stabilizer jets went into action. The *Peccable* froze for a fraction of a second, then began to glide.

It struck the blood-red ocean nose first. Furiously, Harskin climbed from his cradle and into his spacesuit. *Now, if we only figured the buoyancy factor right—*

TWO SPACESUITED figures waited for him at the airlock. He grinned at them, threw open the hatch, and stepped into the outer chamber. The door opened; a wall of water rushed at him. He squirted out of the sinking ship and popped to the surface like a cork. A moment later he saw Mawley and Dominic come bobbing above the water nearby.

He turned. All that was vis-

ible of the *Peccable* was the rear jet assembly and the tips of the once-proud wings. An oily slick was starting to cover the bright red water. The ship was sinking rapidly as water poured into the lock.

"Look over there!" Mawley exclaimed.

Harskin looked. Something that looked like a small island with a neck was approaching him: a monstrous turtle-like thing with a thick, saurian neck and a crested unintelligent head, from which dangled seven or eight fleshy barbels.

And riding in a sort of howdah erected on the broad carapace were three gnorphs, peering curiously at the three space-suited men bobbing in the water.

The rescue party was on time.

"Help!" cried Harskin. "Rescue us! Oh, I beg of you, rescue us, and we'll be eternally obliged to you! Rescue us!"

He hoped the converter was translating the words with a suitable inflection of piteous despair.

DOUBLE PLUS PRIORITY 03-16-2952 Abs XPF32 EXP FORCE ANTARES SYSTEM TO HIGH COMMAND TERRA:

BE ADVISED ANTARES SYSTEM IN TERRAN FOLD. RIGELLIANS ON HAND HAVE VALIDATED OUR TREATY WITH INHABITANTS OF FAFNIR ANTARES' ONE WORLD. ALL IS WELL AND NO CASUALTIES EXCEPT SHIP *PECCABLE* ACCIDENTLY DESTROYED. FIFTEEN MEMBERS OF CREW PLUS ONE RIGEL PRISONER LIVING IN DOME ON COMPANION WORLD FASOLT, THREE OF US LIVING ON FAFNIR. PLEASE SEND PICKUP SHIP DOUBLE FAST AS WE ARE CURRENTLY IN MENIAL SERVITUDE.

ALL THE BEST. LOVE AND KISSES ETC.

HARSKIN

Another Fine combination of *"Emsh cover fun story by Robert Silverberg"* is featured in Issue Number 32 of the pocket size

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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

Were the newcomers the same aliens who had devastated Earth, or were they descendants of refugees from that period?

The Disinherited

by Irving Cox Jr.

(author of "The Janus City")

illustrated by ORBAN

GENERAL HAHN sat stiff-necked in his chair and acknowledged the introduction with a curt nod. The President shook hands with me and gave me a friendly smile, but I could see the lines of fear around his eyes.

I felt numb, like a man in a nightmare. During the last half hour they had taken me from the comfortable obscurity of the university and thrown me into the heart of the crisis. The President told me, "You're the only one who can help us, Dr. Barnes. Our future is in your hands."

And all because I'm a philologist, because I've made a hobby of learning the old, Pre-Gnassi dialects.

Alone in the cell with General Hahn and the President, I listened to the playback of a tape recording. I didn't recognize the dialect at once; it was a poor transcription. I listened for more than a minute before I was able to make out certain phrases,

"...and we are in search of the survivors...coming in peace with assistance for... intention to make the initial landing at New York..."

The tape wound to an end and the machine snapped off. The President looked in my direction. I translated as

much of it as I could.

"You're sure?" General Hahn snapped.

"The dialect is English," I explained. "One of the most widely-used of the Pre-Gnassi languages."

The President suggested thoughtfully, "I don't believe the Gnassi would use one of our own tongues."

"And why not?" Hahn demanded. "Suppose they want to trick us into coming top-side—"

"General, we haven't the manpower or the technology to hold them off a second time."

HAHN CLENCHED his fists. "I say hit their landing party with every weapon we have; make them think that Earth is much stronger. A bluff might pay off."

"Or it might be our end," the President said ominously. "In any case, we're not sure, Hahn; these invaders could be men who escaped from Earth before we used the bomb."

"And waited four centuries to come home?"

"We don't know what hardships they may have suffered. If they tried to live in the bubbles on Mars, their civilization may have fallen back to a primitive level, as ours did."

"The Gnassi can't come back," I put in weakly. "We destroyed them all four centuries ago when we dropped the cobalt bombs."

"So we believed. But yesterday, Dr. Barnes, an unidentified spaceship took up an orbit above the earth."

The General showed me a photograph of the ship, taken from the observatory of one of our top-side resorts. A tiny, space-suited figure, engaged in repairing the hull, gave me a relative idea of the size of the ship. It was enormous, fully as large as one of our underground city shafts.

At fifteen-minute intervals, the President told me, the ship had beamed the radio message to Earth—the message which I had heard on the recording tape.

"No government expert," he added, "was able to make a translation. We were entirely in the dark, until one of the clerks found evidence in the security file that you might know the Pre-Gnassi dialects, Dr. Barnes. Now that you identify this language as English, it supports my argument that the invaders are men."

Hahn put in doggedly, "It could still be a trick—"

THE PRESIDENT ignored him. "The Defense Council, Dr. Barnes, has set up a top side observatory expedition. You and General Hahn will have co-equal authority. The invaders are already sending landing boats down to the site of the city of New York; your expedition is instructed to move as close to their base camp as possible. Observe their behavior, eavesdrop on their conversations, until you satisfy yourself that they are either men or Gnassi. How we make initial contact will be your responsibility, Dr. Barnes."

"That's too much authority!" Hahn explided. "Barnes is a civilian, a professor of philology, yet you permit him—"

"Barnes is the only man able to make the contact. We've been through all this, Hahn." The President took my hand. "You're an intelligent man, sir; I don't need to remind you that the survival of our civilization may depend upon what you do."

"If the invaders are Gnassi," I said, "it may be very difficult to determine. No description survived the first invasion. Of course, any obvious physical difference—"

"Would mean nothing," the President said. "We h a v e lived four centuries underground. If any man escaped from Earth before the bomb, we have no idea what environment he had to adjust to. There's a possibility, too, that we have changed as a result of the cobalt radiation. In the final analysis, Dr. Barnes, it isn't p h y s i c a l appearance which defines a man. Behavior, attitude, intelligence, cultural goal: those are the things that count."

It seemed clear to me why I had been chosen to go with Hahn's expedition. This was a decision to be made by an academic scholar, not the absolute thinking of the military. It wasn't until later that I really understood the question which the President had posed for me to answer.

LESS THAN an hour later the expedition went topside—General Hahn, myself, and half a dozen armed security officers, handpicked by

the General and obviously loyal to him. I had been on the surface before. I usually spent a part of my vacation at one of the resorts; most modern physicians recommend the benefits of natural sunlight to supplement the vita-lamps in our sleeping cells. But I had never been beyond the boundary of a resort. Few people have, except on observatory expeditions authorized by the government; it is considered far too dangerous.

All told, there are eighteen resorts scattered around the globe. The largest contains a thousand acres, the smallest, less than two hundred. It is not the only land we might reclaim, but it is all we have the technical facilities at the present time to protect. Every resort is surrounded by the invisible wall of a magnetic force screen, one of the few weapons which survived the Pre-Gnassi era. The resorts have been cleared of all harmful animal life, and the government has attempted to restore the vegetation as it was before the invasion.

THE LAND beyond the resorts is commonly referred to as the surface desert. In a strict sense, that word no longer applies. During the first century after men used the cobalt bomb, the top-side was undoubtedly a wasteland; but the poisonous radioactive clouds have long since dispersed. None of the old natural world survived, but life itself was not wiped out; in the past three centuries the surface desert has slowly begun to bloom again—with a nightmare riot of evolutionary forms. Military expeditions have brought back photographs of monsters which have evolved from the rabbit, and others—equally as impressive—which seem to be distantly related to the house cat. The huge rats, however, are the most deadly fighters in the jungle.

However, the great majority of new animal forms bear no resemblance to anything from the past—at least not to the few descriptive references in the surviving written record. Our precious handful of books is the only data we have on he Pre-Gnassi civilization.

Man's own past has always been an enigma to us. Relatively few human beings survived the cobalt bombs. Those who did moved underground, where they faced the nearly insurmountable task of building a new culture without tools. A terrible fear of the top-side radioactivity preyed on their minds, and by the second generation we were close to savagery, the past legend.

It was two hundred years before side tunnels finally connected all the deep caves and mine shafts, where the survivors had taken refuge, and fifty more before the

pooling of inherited knowledge made it possible for us to restore any of man's technology. Probably our most magnificent engineering achievement was the tunnel under the Bering Strait into Asia, and finally to the caves of Europe and Africa.

OUR EXPLORATORY expedition went top-side at the resort nearest New York, a mountain lake some ninety miles northwest of the city. Before we went beyond the boundary force-field, we put on the traditional, lead-lined surface suits. We all knew that the radiation had dispersed generations ago, yet we have used the suits so long we feel naked without them. And the surface suits do give us some protection, since each has a built-in magnetic field powerful enough to repel the smaller animals.

We have no transportation designed for the surface; our cars are built for the high-speed pneumatic tunnels which form an underground transportation network connecting our scattered living shafts. However, the Defense Council has attempted to adapt the cars to top-side conditions by adding wheels and an independent motor unit, deriving its power from a magnetic force field. The resulting hybrid is cumbersome, noisy and decidedly uncomfortable.

I was used to the smooth and effortless travel in the pneumatic tunnels. The swaying of the rattling surface car made me feel as if my insides were being torn apart. After ten minutes of that torment, my brain swam with nausea.

MY DISCOMFORT amused General Hahn. Smiling slyly, he kept asking —with exaggerated solicitude —how I felt. "Just say the word, Dr. Barnes, and we'll make a rest stop," he promised me repeatedly. "As I told the Council, a civilian without military training isn't much value to us top-side."

I answered through clenched teeth. "I'm all right, Hahn." I was determined not to ask for special favors and, because I refused to give in to the nausea, I eventually conquered it.

After that, I became aware of my surroundings; the car was lumbering through dense foliage which towered above us. For more than an hour we were in the forest, dismal, hot, and fetid with an acrid stench that burned our throats and made our eyes water. Using a compass, Hahn drove the car on a twisted course, keeping to the relatively open spaces between the trunks of the trees.

When we emerged on an open plain, the air was cleaner, but the sun beat down on us like a blast from an open furnace. Hahn told me the heat was entirely normal.

"This is mid-summer," he explained. "Top-side the earth has seasons, Dr. Barnes."

"I know that."

"You've read about it, of course. That's a professor's job, isn't it—to bury himself in books? But it's different when you experience the real thing; now, if you'd had the regular military training—"

"I've spent many of my vacations at the resorts during the summer, General."

"Then naturally you know about the weather, Dr. Barnes. Forgive me for bringing up the matter."

AS SOON as we were out of the forest, the men unslung their weapons and propped them through the open windows of the car. In the open, Hahn told me, our danger increased. Only small, plant-eating animals lived in the forest; the carnivores—particularly huge rats and the big cats—inhabited the plain.

Our car made more time. Occasionally we traveled over the remnants of surface roads, cracked and overgrown with weeds. Twice we passed rubble heaps which had once been cities. No community, large or small, had survived the Gnassi war. That was why we had so little material with which to do research into our past; nothing—no book, no artifact, no machine—had ever been taken from the ruins. All that we had to work with was the handful of things the survivors had taken with them into the caves, and the heriditary legends warped by our long descent into barbarism.

The sun was still high in the western sky when we saw the sprawling debris of the city of New York on the horizon. Hahn stopped the car, concealing it in a mass of shrubs. We intended to go the rest of the way on foot, so that the landing party from the spaceship would have no warning of our approach.

WE WERE about to leave the car when one of the men gasped and pointed toward a gully, north of the hiding place. A rat was moving toward us, sniffing at the ground. I had seen pictures, but no photograph can do justice to the reality. The animal was gray, covered with short hair. It caught our scent and reared up on its haunches as our men began to fire. The arc of the magnetic force beam caught at the rat's forepaws; the animal screeched, a sound like a woman's scream.

Frantically General Hahn tried to start the motor again. "We'll try to outrun it," he said. "The damn' things are pretty much immune to our weapons."

Still screaming, the rat leaped at our car, pushing it on its side. As I was hurled back against the side wall, I saw a shadow fall across the open window and an enor-

mous, black paw swept the rat aside. A huge cat, remarkably like a Siamese, stood over us, hissing. The rat's jaws snapped shut on empty air. The big paw lashed out again, tearing a ragged wound in the gray pelt, and the rat fled.

Then, very delicately, the cat righted our car. The men began to fire at this new enemy. Ignoring the pin-prick stabs of energy, the cat moved regally away from us. Some fifty feet from the car, it sat watching us while it licked blood from its claws. Except for its ebony feet and ears, the cat was a cream white; its big eyes were turquois blue, flecked at the center with yellow. I was amazed at the facility of its claws, which it used like the fingers of a human hand.

After nearly twenty minutes of continuous firing, our energy guns drove the cat away—or perhaps the feline was ready to move of its own accord. I don't believe the force beam annoyed it particularly.

WE SHOULDERED our weapons and our boxes of supplies and began the march to the city. General Hahn took us on a roundabout route, so that we were always hidden from the settlement.

The invaders had made a clearing in the city debris near the bank of the river. Their landing shuttle was the heart of their temporary community. They had set up domed shelters and tube-like machines on tripods; we assumed that the machines were weapons. Because of the jumbled crevices in the ruins, partly covered with a thick mantle of vegetation, we were able to set up our observation post within sixty feet of the camp.

We used the wide beam on the energy gun to push out a small living cell in the debris. The entrance was covered with a camouflage net, which Hahn assured me would give us adequate protection. We pierced the roof with an observation glass, which projected a slight magnification of the camp on the viewing screen.

Hahn and I counted twenty people in the clearing, unloading supplies from the shuttle or setting up various machines—either weapons, or their own special kinds of observation equipment. None of them had yet removed either helmet or spacesuit, so we did not see the invaders directly. Judging from the shape of their bulky suits, I was reasonably sure they resembled us physically. They had, at least, two arms and two legs in the proper places; all seemed considerably taller than we are.

Hahn picked up the height—difference immediately. "They're Gnassi," he de-

clared; "that's obvious, Barnes."

The invaders communicated by means of some device fixed in their helmets, but we were too far away to distinguish their words. At my suggestion, Hahn sent one of his men to plant a pick-up microphone closer to the clearing.

AS OUR MAN wormed his way cautiously through the ruins, I saw two rats on the other side of the camp. They reared up, smelling the air, and the invaders saw them. Apparently the newcomers had tangled with the rats before, for they sprang at once for their weapons. With a noise louder than a tunnel cave-in, fire and smoke burst from the long tubes fastened to the tripods. In a moment the rats were dead, their gray skin torn and bleeding.

. Hahn's face went white; his hands, on the observation glass, were trembling. "Gnassi weapons," he whispered.

"Or a new technique men have developed," I suggested.

"It was like this before, Barnes. They came from the sky, and nothing we threw against them was powerful enough—"

"If they are Gnassi, the only alternative we have is compromise; we must make peace, Hahn."

"Surrender: that's all they'll ask. If we destroy this landing party, we gain time, Barnes—time enough to build weapons like theirs."

Suddenly, a jumble of voices filled the tiny observation cell; our man had take advantage of the confusion in the invader camp to set up the mike in the clearing. In the projection glass we could see him still lying in a ditch close to the camp. For the moment, he was unable to move, because the rat attack had put the invaders on the alert; armed sentries had been ordered to patrol the clearing.

I TURNED down the volume in the voice pick-up and I could make out the individual words. By interpreting the unknown from the whole context, I was able to give Hahn a relatively accurate translation of what they were saying. Most of it was what I would have expected. They were taking inventory of their supplies and dividing the cases among the temporary shelters; they were organizing a series of watches to protect the camp during the night. One of the invaders was using a machine to test the atmosphere for radioactivity, and another was using a transmitter to contact survivors.

The invader asked, after a time, "Do you think anyone heard the message from the ship?"

The man who seemed to command the expedition replied, "They may have forgotten how to build a receiv-

er. Don't forget what we went through on Mars; the war may have smashed up the Earth civilization entirely."

"Then we'll have to round them up one by one."

"If there *are* any survivors," another man put in gloomily.

"The scientists tell us some men must certainly have taken refuge in caves and escaped the cobalt radiation; at the time, they knew what precautions to take."

"Suppose the Gnassi did that, too?"

"They didn't know about bombs; they were all destroyed. We've always believed that."

One of the invaders laughed. "Belief, yes—a nice fairy tale we've told ourselves. But what sort of proof have we?"

I SHOT A glance at General Hahn. The dialogue seemed to settle our problem. As far as I was concerned, the invaders were men.

"We've no proof," he told me stubbornly. "We haven't even a legend suggesting that any men escaped before we used the bombs. Where would they have found the spaceships? Only the Gnassi had them. They attacked us from the sky, Barnes; don't forget that."

"Men could have seized ships from the enemy." I gestured toward the observation screen. "And *they* call themselves men, Hahn."

"That doesn't mean they aren't Gnassi. Obviously the war wrecked their civilization. They fell back into savagery, just as we did."

"Then why should they be speaking a Pre-Gnassi dialect?"

"They learned it at the time of the invasion. Very possibly it survived in their culture, along with the idea of calling themselves men."

"It seems to me, Hahn, that you depend upon supposition—"

My words choked off. I turned, as Hahn did, to stare in fear and disbelief at the glass. The invader who had been testing the atmosphere told his expedition the air was uncontaminated; one by one they stripped off their spacesuits. We saw them then for the first time—tall, powerfully-built men wearing skin-tight shorts which left them naked above the waist.

Not men, no—they were completely hairless, except for the crown of bristling fuzz growing on their heads. The skin was pale, glistening like naked marble in the afternoon sun.

"Gnassi!" Hahn whispered.

IN A MOMENT of panic, I instinctively agreed with him. I cannot describe the disgust I felt as I looked on these hairless human caricatures; it would have seemed far less repulsive if their physical difference had been

greater. I remembered what the President had said to me: the decision, so important to our survival, could not be made on a basis of appearances.

Had he guessed the truth? Had he known that the Gnassi would call themselves men? Was that why I had been delegated to make contact, so that I might capitalize on the semantic confusion of the name-word and prevent another war?

The answer was clear. The President had given me a pretext which I could build into a compromise. He had suggested that a physical difference could have been caused by the hereditary effect of radiation. Actually, that was improbable; four centuries is a very short time for a mutation to appear in an entire species.

I listened carefully as the invaders talked, trying to spot clues to their attitude and their social pattern. The President had said I must decide on that basis.

The Gnassi talked precisely as we would have, under similar circumstances. They were disturbed by the unfamiliar animals and by the rubble of the city. They had not expected, I gathered, quite so much devastation.

"The bombs wouldn't have done it," a technician said. "Less than twenty were exploded."

"So we've always believed, but our record isn't complete."

"Perhaps the Gnassi wrecked all the cities out of vengeance, when they knew they were doomed and couldn't escape."

"That may be the answer; we'll never know."

VERY OBVIOUSLY, they considered the Gnassi beings different from themselves. My pulse hammered with excitement when I realized what that meant. Their history of the invasion was as vague as ours; the compromise was still possible.

Another invader asked, as he unloaded a crate from the landing shuttle, "I'm wondering if there are any survivors at all. We've been broadcasting the message for almost twenty-four hours, and no one's shown up yet."

"Their technical knowledge may have declined. But the important point is this: Earth is not thickly settled; that means we can come home again."

The more I thought about the fact that the Gnassi called themselves men, the more it puzzled me. How was it possible for an invading culture to confuse itself so completely with ours? A possible answer occured to me, then—one which left me cold with fear.

Abruptly, the viewscreen erupted with activity. The invaders had found our man,

still hiding on the edge of the clearing. He tried to run, but they circled around him, dragging him down. In a moment it was over. One of them pinioned his arms, while another ripped open his surface suit.

I heard a single word, whispered in fear, "Gnassi!"

The prisoner began to babble in a tongue none of them understood. The commander of the expedition said dully, "Then—then the Gnassi went underground and men were wiped out."

"The old war all over again!"

"But we haven't the strength—"

"We've only one chance: we have to get away now, and hope they've no way of following our ship."

ONE OF THE invaders lifted his head and looked across the rubble toward the setting sun. Brokenly he said, "This means—that men can never come back to Earth, never come home again."

The leader of the expedition turned toward their transmitter. "I'll radio the ship and tell them what's happened; the rest of you start loading the equipment back into the shuttle."

Their conversation, since the capture of our man, I had not translated; it moved too quickly. I looked at Hahn. His face was grim and set; behind him his men had shouldered their weapons, waiting for his order to attack.

"It's up to you," I told him, in a strangled whisper. "We can't let them use that transmitting machine. No bloodshed, Hahn, if you can prevent it; we have to question them."

He smiled. "I knew you'd see it my way, professor."

The General and his men left our observation cell. I dropped on the ground in front of the viewing glass, sick with nausea. Hahn was wrong. I didn't see it his way, no, but I did at last understand the truth. We are the Gnassi. The invaders—pale and hairless—are the men we drove from Earth.

Was I leaping to a conclusion without evidence? I doubted it. Perhaps, as a philologist, I read too much into the survival of a language, but to me it meant only one thing. The hairless things spoke the Pre-Gnassi dialect—a language of men—and we did not. Yet, I still believed there was one possibility of making a compromise. They were as unable to begin a new war as we were. It might be possible to persuade them to accept the fiction that radiation had caused our physical differences. I had to talk to them; I couldn't let them radio their ship.

I WATCHED the conflict on the screen. Although the invaders' weapons were superior to ours, Hahn had the

advantage of surprise. Hahn was clever enough to see that hand-to-hand fighting gave them very little opportunity to use their guns. But his most effective tactic was bluff. He used our force-field beam upon a piece of their equipment, where the results were obvious for them all to see; by threatening the men with the weapon, he frightened them into submission. If he had actually used it upon them, of course, they would have discovered that the force-field is painful but relatively impotent against a living organism.

Hahn lined his prisoners up against the hull of their landing shuttle. The sunset shadows were lengthening upon the rubble of the city. The sky was red and the light was reflected upon the naked chests of the invaders. I left the observation cell and walked toward them. I saw lines of terror sharply etched in their faces.

I STRIPPED off my surface suit and held out my hand in greeting. They shrank back against the cold hull, staring in at the silver mat of hair which covered my body

"We welcome you," I said. "We have waited long years for our fellow men to return from the stars." Although I had developed considerable facility in translating their dialect, it was much more difficult to speak it and make myself clear.

"You know English?" the leader of the expedition asked. The sound of the familiar words seemed to put him more at ease.

"I'm a philologist; I specialize in the Pre-Gnassi dialects."

He glanced at Hahn's men lined up behind me. "We have not come here as enemies, but to find survivors of our own kind."

"And you have?"

"You? You're Gnassi. If you allow us to go in peace—"

"The Gnassi were destroyed four hundred years ago." Glibly I made the explanation of our differences which the President had suggested to me. "Physically," I added, "the effect of radiation may have altered our appearance—or yours—but the thing that makes us men comes from the spirit. We are brothers because of the way we think, the world we make, the dreams we have."

"But in four centuries no mutation could—" He broke off and looked into my eyes. His brows arched. "Compromise? Is that what you're proposing? How much authority do you have?"

"I speak for the government of the earth."

"We're ready to call it quits, too." He took my hand then, in spite of his evident revulsion. "You know, I be-

lieve we could pull it off. We want no more wars."

A SHADOW fell across the clearing. We all looked up. One of the big cats—I was sure it was the same giant Siamese which had rescued us from the rat—sat twenty feet away, watching us through slit eyes. There was a stir of fear among the men.

"Don't worry about him," I said. "The cats seem to be harmless."

"How many Gnassi—" The commander caught himself. "How many of you survived?"

"We have a population of about ten million in the city shafts."

"And we have nearly nine. There's room, then, for us to come home?"

"The Earth belongs to both of us. This time, perhaps, we can make something better than the rubble of civilization."

"Working together in peace—" He sighed. "Our scientists say that men and Gnassi are biologically able to intermarry. We're desperately in need of a place where our population can expand. For centuries—since the war—we've been holed up inside the bubbles on Mars. The resources there aren't enough to support a larger population than we have right now."

I turned to Hahn to explain the compromise. I expected protest from him; instead he seemed relieved. Perhaps he feared the superior weapons the men had, or perhaps he intuitively guessed the truth. Vaguely the overwhelming difference in weapons began to disturb me, as well as the fact that men possessed a spaceship and we did not. How was it possible, four hundred years ago, for the Gnassi to have attacked and defeated such a technology?

"May I use the transmitter now?" the commander asked.

"Certainly."

"I want to tell the ship to send the news on to Mars that men are free to come home again."

AS HE MOVED toward the machine, the Siamese cat stood up, arching its back lazily. Then, suddenly, its paw shot out and it snatched the machine from the commander with its hand-like claw.

The cat towered over us; we heard a deep-throated, jungle growl, and a telepathic pattern of words pounded into our minds, "It's good to see you settle your differences, after all these years, but unfortunately Earth isn't yours to give away any longer."

Shrilly Hahn cried, "The cat's talking!" He unslung his force beam and aimed it at the animal; nonchalantly the cat snapped the weapon out of his hands.

"We're telepaths, of course. We should thank you for that, I suppose. You created us by dropping your cobalt

bombs. But Earth belongs to us, now. We like it as it is. We're not inviting you back—to build your cities and your machines again, and to fight your ridiculous wars. Now that you've made your peace, it's time for the survivors here to move to Mars."

I said, "The bubbles are already overcrowded; there's no more room to—"

"That isn't our problem. Build spaceships and find another world."

The commander protested, "Why should we take Gnassi survivors—"

"GNASSI!" The telepathic concept quivered with amusement. "Men waste so much effort dying for legends of their own making. There was no invasion; there are no Gnassi. It is a typical cultural evolution of a barbaric people that you should have personified the word, both of you in precisely the same way. The word derives from an obscure political cult. When you were at each other's throats four centuries ago, you apparently used the term to label your enemy—and you carried it with you into your period of savagery as a name for an imagined invader of the earth. It was easier to blame an imaginary outsider for the devastation of the earth, than to shoulder the responsibility yourselves."

"How do you know all this?"

"We have taken enough printed material out of the ruined cities to piece together a fairly accurate picture."

"So that's why our researchers found nothing when—"

"We wanted a record of the species which preceded ours in dominating the earth."

"I won't believe it!" This bellow came from Hahn. "If we're all men, why do we look different?"

"Your scientists tell you that not enough time has passed for a mutation to affect the species. In theory, that is correct—but only if the mutation originally appears in only a few individuals. In your case, you were all affected during the first generation after you used the bomb. There was no possible escape, except for those who used the spaceships to go to Mars before the cobalt bombs were exploded."

AFTER A pause, the cat spoke again, "Climb high on the rubble, you men of Earth, and see the scars of your making. In your new world, wherever it may be, teach this one thing to your children: *you* wrecked Earth—not the Gnassi, not an alien invader—but you yourselves. Examine your social traits; find the secret for living together without periodically ripping your culture apart. You, Dr. Barnes—" Above me I saw the sudden glitter of the slitted, turquois eyes, "—

you have made a beginning in recognizing the basic question which your President put to you: what is man? Physical appearance is not the answer, nor are any of the solutions men have tried in the past. When you know the answer, perhaps we will welcome you home again; but until you know it, you are the disinherited of the Earth.

"We've agreed to give you a year to evacuate your caves and tunnels," the Siamese went on, and it seemed to me there was a connotation of sorrow in the telepathic pattern of ideas. "Crowd together in the bubbles on Mars, or look for a new world; what you do is up to you. But wherever you go, try to build a culture and a society tailored to the needs of man. You'll discover maturity when you do."

The cat moved away. I glanced at the hairless, white face of the expedition commander, scarlet in the light of the setting sun. And he was s t a r i n g at the thick growth of hair on my arms and chest. Each of us, I knew, was thinking the same thing. Solemnly we shook hands again, and the barrier of mutual revulsion began to crumble. We thought; we dreamed: we were, therefore, men.

Not Both Ways

[*continued from page* 38]

serious criticism in order to keep my low taste from getting the upper hand, to avoid falling into error of equating "enjoyment" with "literature" in all cases. You know, as in Kipling's verse, "To walk with kings nor lose the common touch."

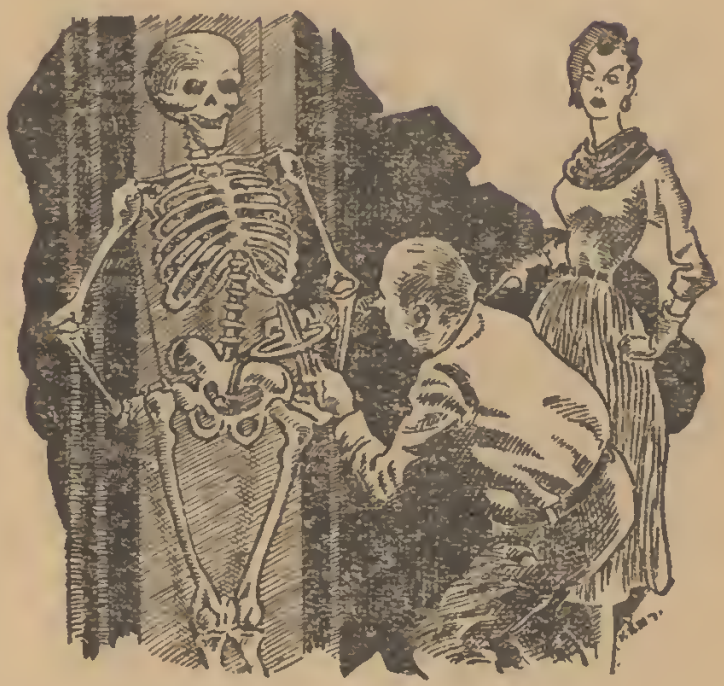
These are past enjoyments—or revisits to the past, since I've re-read these stories within the last few years. Ambition bids me to put them in their place, and taste impels me to reject with dislike present versions of the same. My conditional acceptance of the van Vogt and Keller that was doesn't mean *approval* (even on a limited scale) of the same sort of thing in today's science fiction writing, any more than limited enjoyment and acceptance of some of the pleasures in owning slaves (via history and the movies, etc.) means approval and acceptance of slavery today.

So, Outraged Reader, there are two mutually-e x c l u s i v e basic attitudes toward science fiction, each with its satisfactions and liabilities. God be thanked, we are free to choose either—but none of us can have it both ways, at the same time. RAWL

femmequin 973

by Fritz Leiber

(author of "Coming Attraction")



The skeleton had a female look.

illustrated by C. A. MURPHY

★ FEMMEQUIN 973 ★

by Fritz Leiber

The femmequin that Rita Bruhl wanted Harry Chernik to make for an old acquaintance was somewhat irregular!

YOU WOULD have known that the gleaming skeleton hanging from the black work-rack was going to be a girl, although the steel bones were thinner and fewer, the platform for the electronic brain was in the chest and not in the head, and the pelvis held not a womb but a large gyroscope.

The skeleton had that air and attitude; it *was* that enticing, p r o v o c a t i v e gesture that means w o m a n—whether it turns up in a fashion-magazine a d v e r t i s e m e n t or a Stone Age carving.

It was a room like a cave, black except where bright lights beat on the work-rack and the silvery skeleton. A stooping man was touching a limb of the skeleton with a tool that made a faint *grrr*.

Behind the man, unseen by him, was a real w o m a n, clothed in flesh and embellished with clothes—except that after seeing that dangling skeleton you would always doubt a little whether any woman was real and warm and alive. And this woman's face was straight out of a fashion magazine in its cold inscrutable pride, and deadly purpose. She advanced toward the unknowing man. The silvery skeleton got more distinct to her, she could see the cables of its muscles, thin as threads. She could make out on its gleaming limbs—tiny humps, to which a substitute for flesh would later be attached. She could discern the disdainful curves of the latticework making up its metallic skull. She could see the black motors and batteries crowding its slender waist.

The stooped man also became clearer. He was short, even allowing for his stoop. The two lines going up between his eyebrows looked as if slashed by a black pencil. He seemed to be trembling a little, but never when he touched the gleaming skeleton. The *grrr* had stopped and he was stroking a silver limb with a pad of rouge.

The woman hesitated for a m o m e n t. Then she said, "Chernik!" and at the same instant touched his shoulder. He jumped as if her two fingers were the fangs of a poisonous snake.

HARRY CHERNIK had one of the oddest jobs in one of the strangest and most secret businesses in the modern world. He was assistant engineer and final tune-up man in a femmequin factory.

Harry owed his job to the intervention of a friend and his own unusual mechanical talents. It was he who cut the cams that gave the pale suede-rubber shoulders of the shimmying femmequins such a delectably lazy wriggle. It was his itch for perfection that kept the powerful electric motors inside the dainty torsos as silent as shy innocence, and the tungsten-steel cables that went down to each rosy toe and fingertip —as quiet in their sheathes as blase experience. And as for the quartz-crystal inner ear which controlled the gyroscope that kept the femmequin in perfect balance in all attitudes (replacing the less reliable mecury type), he was actually its inventor, though there was no question of patents on such a device, any more than there was on the reciprocating, contractile, variable pulse gadget that was the central feature of each femmequin.

In fact, Harry Chernik was far more important to the company than Mr. Jones, the chief engineer, though he was never told this by Mr. Bissel —the man who shipped the femmequins to the very wealthy individuals (or the clubbed-together slightly-less-wealthy men) buying them, and who also raked in the profits.

But Harry Chernik would never have stayed on at his peculiar job for a lifetime, except that he believed himself to be a very ugly man, and as such incapable of arousing love in any woman. His work was a substitute for he tender relaionships that life denied him, or that he denied himself. When he was mounting a motor—whether a powerful one in the molybdenum-steel ribwork of a femmequin, or a feather-weight one in the armored skull to tighten the delicate ring of cable that puckered the lips—he was possessed by an intense and unwearying excitement that was more than that generated by the exercise of fine craftmanship.

WHEN A millionaire customer asked for some new and almost undevisably realistic feature in a femmequin, Harry could be depended upon to work five nights running without the prod of extra money. Mr. Bissel and Mr. Jones were well aware of how their assistant engineer was wedded to his work, and how much of their own financial success was due to the passion of this marriage; being wise, if not generous men, they gave him no hint of this. Indeed, they pretend-

ed to find a great deal of fault with his work and even after twenty years were not above hinting that he might shortly be discharged. They believed, and quite accurately, that fear of losing a job that meant much more to Chernik than money would drive him to a higher pitch of inventiveness.

Mr. Bissel would sometimes explain frankly to his intimates, "You can't turn out a really good product unless you love it. Now most of us here are just a little bit contemptuous of our girls, and of the boobs who buy them. In the selling end, that doesn't hurt; but in the production end it does. We have only two people here who really love our girls, and Chernik is one of them."

It must not be thought that Harry Chernik's position allowed him to enjoy the ingenious robot caresses of the femmequins he labored to perfect, and that such crass privileges were the final tie between him and his job. Quite the opposite was the case.

AFTER THE femmequins left him in the form of eerie steel skeletons, to receive their suede-rubber flesh and have their eyes and tongues and other details mounted, he was hardly permitted to touch them. More than once at final tune-up Mr. Bissel had said, "Not you, Harry. Your hands are oily, you'll smudge her," and it would be Rita Bruhl's or Joe Novak's fingers which would burrow into the invisible slit in the femmequin's back and unzip the large window there. Only when this was fully open, and the rest of the femmequin draped in a protective shroud, would Harry be allowed to approach and work his magic on the motors, making the final corrections that first testing had shown necessary.

He was invariably dismissed before final testing. This delicate job was the prerogative of Joe Novak, who nevertheless dressed like a fashion plate and was handsome in a beefy way. Mr. Bissell put a great deal of trust in Joe's judgement, believing him to have had a wealth of amatory experience in real life. (This last assumption was quite untrue, but there were limits even to Mr. Bissel's sagacity. In any case Joe's judgements were vindicated in terms of customer satisfaction.)

Yet, Harry Chernik's ardor was not dampened by the fact that he knew vastly more about the insides of his girls than a surgeon knows about the insides of his repeater patients, without enjoying anything of a surgeon's dignity and prestige. A real skeleton would have horrified a prospective customer less than a glimpse of one of the femmequins in the

extremely undressed state in which Harry Chernik worked on them. But Harry, viewing them, was ravished by titillations invisible to other eyes. He saw the langorous undulation of a hip in the curves of a cam, the inviting turn of a haughty head in the routing of a cable, the unswerving glance of wide blue eyes in the adjustment of a photoelectric cell. In fact, Harry might have outgrown his job except for the exceedingly devious nature of the satisfactions he found in it. As in the case of normal love, distance added enchantment.

THERE WAS, of course, a more personal reason for Harry Chernik's strange pattern of life than these general considerations. Long ago, he had fallen utterly in love. More important, Louise had been submissive, and more easily hurt than himself, so that for once he had managed to conquer his terrible dread of ridicule and really think of asking someone to marry him. She had returned his love; he had been about to propose, when she had been snatched away from him by an exceedingly handsome and brilliant young man, who had overwhelmed her by imaginative romantic attentions and then actually gone on to marry her. It had always seemed unjust to Harry cruelly that John Gottschalk had deprived him of Louise; Gottschalk had the equipment to win any girl, no matter how beautiful, proud and vixenish. Why should John insist on a mousy and gentle creature like Louise?

It was after this catastrophe, that a guarded message about "an interesting job opportunity" had come from, of all people, Rita Bruhl.

RITA WAS an exceptionally handsome, but always severely-dressed girl, who had been John Gottschalk's companion on double dates with Louise and Harry, before the attraction between John and Louise had shown itself. Harry had always thought of Rita, with impersonal bitterness, as the sort of girl whom men like John should take the trouble to win. He would never have dreamed of risking any advances himself, and was quite startled that she should remember him at all, let alone do him a favor.

It turned out that Rita worked for a firm manufacturing dress shop mannequins, according to the story she first told him. She introduced him to Mr. Bissel, who, after sounding him out carefully and seeing some evidence of his mechanical ability, bound him to secrecy and then revealed to him that they were bringing out a line of animated mannequins, which a chain of big department stores planned as its smash advertising surprise for next year. Harry found pleasure in dis-

cussing the means whereby the movements of wheels and levers and tiny pneumatic pumps could be translated into the flexures and swellings of a chilly pseudo-flesh. (That was before he knew that the femmequins were temperature-controlled to human normal.) Taken to the machine shop, he saw the fleshless steel forms in all their surrealist beauty. Inspecting them more closely, he spotted mechanical crudities that made his fingers and mind itch to be tinkering. He took the job.

IT WASN'T many weeks before he realized that the story about department store advertising had been a blind. But by that time he loved his "skelegirls" (as he sometimes called them) a bit too much.

Indirectly he heard enough about John Gottschalk to know that both he and his marriage were prospering, though with some setbacks, as when Louise's first and only child died at birth—a tragedy which happened to coincide with Harry finishing work on the first femmequin which he felt to be stamped with his own individual craftsmanship.

What he did hear about John Gottschalk was also enough to keep his hatred alive. Once in a while, Rita Bruhl made use of Chernik, curtly asking secret favors. He made no other friends at the factory.

AND SO Harry Chernik worked for more than twenty years in his shadowland of steel houris, nursing his fear of Mr. Bissel; his awe of Rita Bruhl; his contempt for Joe Novak; his hatred of John Gottschalk, and his thin, unreal love for Louise.

These desires and anxieties, and also his despairs, naturally created a considerable degree of nervousness in Harry Chernik, so that when Rita Bruhl stole up behind him in his workshop and stung him on the shoulder with two fingers, he jumped the earthbound equivalant of half a mile.

"Rita!" he protested gaspingly, "You make me think it's Mr. Bissel, you make me think it's the Federal Bureau of Morals. Why, Rita? We're friends, Rita. Why?"

Rita's eyes were like marble as she looked at him. The pupils and irises were almost lost in the expanse of white.

"Because there is a special reason," she said. "Because I want you to make a special femmequin for a special customer."

"Do we ever do anything besides that, Rita?"

"No," she said, "but femmequin 973 must have motors many times as powerful as any of the others, it must have cables many times as strong, the gadget must be specially armed—I mean equipped. And I must impress my own voice on the wires."

"But that's against the safety rules," Chernik protested. "Our femmequins are built to crack up at that point where they could hurt a customer. Besides, Rita, although you dub in a word here and there, you're not suppsed to do whole wires. And as for fooling with the central gadget—"

"Yes," Rita said, "but femmequin 973 is for a very special customer." And she smiled thoughtfully.

RITA BRUHL went to work for Mr. Bissel just as any other attractive career girl might join the staff of a couturier or fashion magazine. And her work was very much the same. It was to style the femmequins, to decide from her studies of cafe society and fashion art as to whether legs should be made a trifle longer, waists a bit slimmer, breasts full or budding. In compliance with her recommendations, the suede-rubber faces were given a haughty look one year, a palsy-walsy one the next, or perhaps a dewily-innocent expression—or even an intellectual one.

In her early days with the company, such expressions were molded into the suede-rubber. Later, as Harry Chernik's inventiveness bore fruit, they came to depend on the tensions of tiny systems of wires rooted in the suede-rubber, or the inflation and deflation of ballon-like cavities in the cheeks. Expressions became living instead of fixed; variety and a greater degree of naturalness were achieved. Frequently she, and Mr. Jones, and Harry would analyze motion-picture close-ups of glamorous actresses, breaking down a sultry or outraged expression into all its split-second stages; then Harry would go off to cut a miraculous new cam. Sometimes, when they couldn't get just what was wanted, Rita herself would emote for Harry; he would watch carefully, and the resultant cam would be even more of a masterpiece.

Frequently Rita's styling assignments involved inviduализing a femmequin: that is, making it a duplicate of some famous screen or TV star, or of a popular advertising model or society girl. In this case, she would have to do a little research to get the exact measurements and characteristic attitudes and gestures. It would also be necessary to run through a great deal of recorded vocal material from radio broadcasts and the like by the desired star, in order to piece together — from sentences, phrases and even single-words—the saucy and tender utterances to be impressed on the magnetic wires in the femmequin's voice box. But Rita was a good mimic; she often used her own voice in difficult cases, even when the needed material might have been otherwise obtained.

Of course such individualizing upped the price of a femmequin considerably, but that was all right with Mr. Bissel.

ON RARE occasions, a customer might ask for a copy of some girl not in the public eye. In this case, it would be necessary for Rita to contact the girl—frequently by posing as the representative of a fashion house that wanted to popularize its products by giving them away to selected individuals. Then she got the necessary data by means of tiny hidden camera and recorders, and by her amazing memory for female mannerisms and behavior.

Mr. Bissel was uneasy about accepting orders of this sort, ever since one had almost involved him in a murder case. The customer had asked for a duplicate of an obscure strip-tease dancer. Some weeks later, the newspapers were screaming about the murder of a very wealthy relative of this same dancer. The girl was under suspicion, since she inherited a fortune, but she had an unbreakable alibi: she had been performing at the burlesque bar at the crucial time. Mr. Bissel was convinced that the girl herself had ordered the femmequin, and used it to perform her act; but there was nothing he could do about it—especially as his business was much more profitable than blackmail. Afterwards, similar orders always worried Bissel, but he could hardly refuse them; they brought the most money of all.

THE REASON the duplicate would have been able to put on a convincing strip act was that this was an accomplishment of all the femmequins. Harry Chernik's cams for this were wonders of intricacy, and Rita Bruhl worked with him closely in styling the clothing of the femmequins—the more expensive came with elaborate trousseaus, like costly dolls—just as she styled every other particular of their equipment and behavior.

And like Harry Chernik, Rita derived intense secret satisfaction from her work—giving herself to many men in many guises, without the unpleasantness of physical, or the responsiblity of emotional contact. High priestess of the cult of her own beauty, she was preoccupied with the preliminary stages of sexual attraction. The later stages were quite repulsive to her.

Naturally, her work permitted Rita to satisfy completely her obsession with nubile female beauty; it was as if she ran a charm school with the added incalculable privilege of creating her pupils from the toes up. But she always put something wholly of herself into her creations—some phrase or gesture or expression that was hers alone. It was for this reason that she

so often impressed her own voice on the wires and that she so frequently modeled emotions and postures for Harry Chernik. And she felt a stab of shivery excitement whenever a femmequin was shipped off in its coffin. Coffins were really used for shipping femmequins. It permitted the shipment to be accompanied by a personal representative of the firm, militating against detection. Also, modern coffins, with their rosily quilted interiors, were appropritated and pleasantly expensive jewel-cases for the robot girls.

THE LITTLE signatures that Rita inscribed on the femmequins were not always unmalicious. She frequently had interviews with men ordering femmequins and during these interviews (when she always behaved with the impersonality of a lawyer or architect) she was able to spot the chinks in the armor around the client's ego—the things that would be most apt to shake his self confidence. Then, if anything about the client annoyed her (and it generally did), she would insert into the femmequin's voice wires some seemingly innocuous remarks calculated to give the client a bad moment or two. But she was careful never to carry this practice so far that complaints came back to Mr. Bissel; in fact, it probably added to the lifelikeness and success of the femmequins.

Also, like Harry Chernik, Rita Bruhl had her private reasons for finding her life's satisfactions in a peculiar occupation, and they were concerned with the same man—John Gottschalk, and the same woman—his wife Louise. John had been one of the very few men, almost the only one, with whom Rita had contemplated falling in love. She sensed in him enough hidden weaknesses, especially a great need to be admired. Rita had definitly decided to say "Yes"—eventually—when he would begin asking her to marry him.

It therefore came to her as a tremendous shock when John shifted his attention to an insignificant, merely pretty girl like Louise and then, monstrously, went on to propose. She could only conceive that he had done it to be revenged on her, because she had not instantly thrown herself into his arms.

THE PASSING years brought no obvious change to Rita. At forty-five her beauty seemed as fresh and unwrinkled as at twenty-five. She became a trifle slimmer—that was the only difference. It was almost as if she herself were one of her metal proteges, immune to age. Occasionally even Mr. Bissel sensed this and almost shuddered—though oddly enough, John, smiling at her across

the luncheon table, never seemed to notice.

But there was change in Rita. Deep inside the perpetual youth of her maidenhood, a worm gnawed. And it was the worm that shaped her words and licked her lips as she patted Harry Chernik's trembling shoulder, down by the work-rack and said, "Don't worry so, Harry dear. You've put all sorts of other special features into femmequins. This one you're working on has seven fingers on each hand, hasn't she? And that one there in the coffin is over six feet tall. So why not one with stronger motors and cables, and with a specially armed gadget, and with only my voice on its wires? Come on, Harry."

But Harry pulled away from her reluctantly, until he was half in the shadows. "I can't do it, Rita," he mumbled. "If Mr. Bissel ever found out I had broken the safety rules..."

"He won't find out, I'll take care of that," Rita assured him.

"And what is this...arming, you call it, for the central gadget?"

"I'll tell you when the time comes to install it."

"But if something should happen to the customer..." Chernik whined desperately.

Rita laughed. "I don't think you'd mind having anything happen to this customer, Harry," she told him. "You see, femmequin 973 is for John Gottschalk."

JOHN GOTTSCHALK'S secret was that he was afraid of women, far more so that Harry Chernik. That was why he married Louise; he could be certain she would never desert him or taunt him in any fashion. She would be an unfailing refuge to which he could return...

For of course there were other women, but his ego became more insecure with each new conquest—he had that much more to lose.

He continued to be a thoughtful husband to Louise, within reasonable limits. It did not occur to him that, as regards himself, anyone could object to reasonable limits and demand everything.

With Rita Bruhl he maintained a luncheon-relationship, nothing more. She showed toward him a dispassionate yet untiring interest deeper, it sometimes seemed, even than love.

JOHN ALWAYS laughed appreciatively at the bits of information Rita let slip about her unusual job. Gradually he inferred the true nature of Mr. Bissel's femmequins and maintained an attitude of slightly contemptuous interest. Though when Rita told him about Harry Chernik's employment in the same business and about Harry's increasing eccentricity and

withdrawal, John would merely smile and shrug.

With the passage of years, John Gottschalk's curiosity about Mr. Bissel's femmequins became by imperceptible degrees more marked. Inevitably so, since John's nervous singlemindedness in his affairs made him look more and more on mental and emotional qualities as merely troublesome.

So it happened that John and Rita began to talk jokingly about what qualities he would like in a femmequin.

When he finally did come to place the order, he felt a sudden twinge of uneasiness, but this was dispelled by Rita's impersonal but approving manner—like a Jeeves when his master has decided to order just the proper wardrobe.

And so, since Harry Chernik was a faithful and inspired workman, since Rita Bruhl was a stern and much-interested task-mistress—and since Mr. Bissel was not an overly-inquisitive boss, the femmequin for John Gottschalk got delivered in its canvas-covered coffin.

BUT JOHN was out. It was his wife Louise who timidly opened the door and showed the two delivery men to John's bedroom. The delivery man, who was Mr. Bissel's representative, never for a moment thought that Louise was Mr. Gottschalk's wife; her manner and her clothes convinced him that she was a servant. He even had his assistant strip the canvas from the coffin, and he smiled knowingly at Louise as he departed.

Afterwards, Louise went back to the bedroom and sat looking at the coffin.

Louise Gottschalk had never thought of herself as an attractive woman and could never understand why John had chosen her; she adored him, made a god of him, and found that the hallmark of a god is that he demands sacrifices. John's affairs sharpened her sense of inadequacy.

And now she sat looking at the strange box shaped so much like a coffin. She wondered if John had taken up an interest in statuary or model spaceships. After looking at the box for a long while, she touched its side.

It opened at once.

A SLIM, BEAUTIFUL woman whom Louise knew sat up stiffly and looked at her. The woman was dressed delectably from the male viewpoint, plunging neckline and all.

"Miss Bruhl...Rita," Louise said astoundedly, edging back.

"My little timid one, my frightened darling," Femmequin 973 exclaimed, suddenly standing up in the coffin. "You see, I know you are frightened, for I know you're

afraid of all women, and of me especially."

Louise shrank away. "Please, Rita, please don't be silly," she croaked faintly.

Femmequin 973 leaned forward, so that the plunging neckline plunged farther. "Don't run, darling. I know you're very surprised and very frightened, but you can't get away from me now." The femmequin suddenly jumped out of the coffin and slowly advanced.

Louise tried to shrink away farther, but the wall was at her back. "Rita, Rita, this is terrible," she gasped.

The slim hands of Femmequin 973 went to its waist and the plunging neckline plunged. "Look at me," she commanded. "I'm very beautiful, aren't I, and even more frightening. I'm afraid this is going to scare you very much; and it's going to hurt you, too." And the arms of Femmequin 973 stretched out and suddenly clasped tight around Louise.

Then Louise finally screamed and fought and shouted, "Stop, Rita, stop!" but Femmequin 973 did not stop. It clasped and loosed and clasped again, for what seemed to be hours of torture, all the while murmuring in Louise's ear. Finally, clutching her tighter yet, Femmequin 973 drew back its exquisite triumphant face and said, "This is what scares you the most, isn't it? This is what you're afraid women will do to you, you..."

Fainting in the steel and suede-rubber embrace, Louise hardly heard the faint clashing and grinding sound, as Femmequin 973 breathed, "...you eunuch."

NEXT TIME AROUND

Thomas N. Scortia is featured in our September issue with a short novel, "Genius Loci", which investigates the question of how anything can freeze—naturally—on a planet where the temperature never drops below 60 degrees F. It's a neat problem, and a neater solution. Emsh's cover will illustrate the situation of a somewhat delinquent youngster who had "His Head In The Clouds" the story being by Calvin M. Knox. Better be sure of getting this issue; I think you'll find it one of the real good ones.

illustrated
by ORBAN

There was a fortune invested in Sam . . .

Golden Boy

by Winston K. Marks

(author of "Pleasure Orbit")

THE MEN who have to do with this new "arena" sport they call RAT (initials for Rough And Tumble) are no better than butchers. I mean this literally. And that goes for the whole lot of them, from ticket-sellers up to the TV sponsors who scramble for the advertising rights.

Like most of the TV fight fans, I thought RAT was no different from wrestling and boxing, which it pretty well replaced as top gladiator attraction in 1960, and I had no conception—I'll swear I didn't—of the caliber of harpies who promote and manage these fights and fighters.

I learned, though, in ten, not-so-easy lessons, the last of which came the night of the championship fight. It wasn't an hour after the bout that my final lesson came, and it began when Vi Crousseau kicked in the door to my bachelor bungalow, shoved big, blond, Sam, the fighter, in ahead of him and beckoned to the others.

They came in, Baker, the TV rights promoter; Hanson, Sam's handler; and little, soft-eyed Len, Sam's manager. They stood around Sam in a half-circle pointing their guns at his back and my front.

Except for the guns, it reminded me of the evening over a year ago when Len brought them all out for our first conference. That night Len had been the spokesman, and I the propositioner, may God have mercy on my soul!

"DOC RUGG, this is Sam and Vi and Mr. Baker and Hanson," Len had said. "Now I want you to tell them what you told me this afternoon."

"Certainly, Len," I said with my heart pounding. I got chairs for them, poured each a cup of coffee which none of them touched, and finally launched into my subject.

"I am a bio-chemist at the university," I explained. "I have just finished a project of my own in colloidal chemistry which leads me to believe that a certain suspension of gold particles taken internally will greatly enhance one's athletic prowess."

I spoke mainly to Sam, because at that time I had the silly notion that it was he I must sell on the proposition. The six-foot-three fighter stared back uncomfortably. "What's he mean, Len, huh? What's he talkin' 'bout?"

Hanson and Vi wore blank, tight-lipped looks of resentful, vacuity, but Baker, the paunchy man in the business suit curled his lip at Len. "Is this why you dragged us out here tonight, just to listen to a new gimmick for doping a pug?"

"Dope?" Hanson picked it up. "Len, you know we can't get away with anything like that, what with saliva and respiration tests at weigh-in and after the fight."

Len raised a slender, white hand. "The doctor tells me that gold is—what did you call it?"

I said, "Gold is quite inert in its metallic state, and—"

"That's it, inert. It won't show up in the normal tests, and Doc says it isn't classified as a drug anyhow."

"That's splitting hairs," Baker pointed out. "If we get caught feeding Sam anything unusual, we'll all get chucked out of the industry. Gold sounds plenty unusual to me."

VI CROUSSEAU, I learned later, was half French and half Abbysinian. All he inherited from his father was his name and a huge, hooked nose; the rest of him was a mountain of glistening flesh. "Some chiseler's always tryin' to corrupt the fight game," he said in a whiskey voice. "Look what happened to wrestling. Anyhow, if it was any good he'd probably rob us blind for it."

"It's expensive," Len agreed, "which is why I had to share this burden with you gentlemen; I couldn't handle it myself."

Perversely, this reacted fa-

vorably on Baker. He squinted, "How expensive?"

I said, "$2000 a dose. It takes a lot of gold, you know." I had an impulse to cut it to $500 a dose, because the actual gold content would run less than $100, but I stuck to my original plan. If I were to sacrifice the professional credit that would come to me from publishing my experiment, then it must be worthwhile. Besides such a repugnant way of cashing in on my Ph. D. required that I justify my compromise with ethics. In nearly six years as assistant professor, I had been unable to save enough to finance my sabbatical year of vacation on the continent, which was due in about 14 months. After all, many a worthless patent medicine was still in circulation; my concoction had genuine merit, if I could believe the incredible improvement in my laboratory animals' stamina and endurance.

THERE WAS a fair argument before it was settled, but I told them the first dose would be free, just to prove that it would work. Then they would pay double for the second dose and a straight $2000 a dose for all future ones.

"How long's a dose last?" Hanson, the trainer, wanted to know."

"It's just good for one fight," I told him. "You see, the basis of improvement is cellular. The finely-divided gold particles are distributed throughout the body in the blood plasma, but the faint negative charge they carry tends to make them penetrate the red blood cells in which the iron of the haemoglobin carries a positive charge. Once they are trapped, they aren't available to the tissues of the muscles and nerves. Within twenty-four hours 95% of the gold has deposited out in the long bones of the legs and arms, the iron-rich sources of the red blood cells."

Sam wasn't even listening. "Two grand a throw!" he exclaimed, "and me still five fights away from the crown. That's ten grand it'll cost, won't it, Len, huh?"

Len reached over and patted him on the shoulder. "Don't you worry, Sammy; it's our dough." He turned and faced the others. "That'll be $500 apiece per fight. I need three partners; who wants in?"

TWELVE days later, I watched Sam smear my color-TV set with his opponent's blood—not that blood is anything unusual in the sport that was spawned in the early 1960's.

When they set up the Rough-And-Tumble rules they buried the Marquis of Queensbury. RAT fighters wear no gloves, just soft shoes over taped toes—to prevent those vulnerable digits from

being torn off—and aluminum groin supporters under their trunks. No fouls are called, except for biting; and even here, the tooth-marks must penetrate the skin before the biter is disqualified.

The promoters who brought the sport out of the back hills, from logging camps and isolated mines, strove to keep all the elements of brute ferocity of actual hand-to-hand combat. The public was belly-filled-up-to-here with prancing boxers and crooked wrestlers; they defended the bloody RAT rules on the grounds that it was the only way they could present honest combat, in which each fighter was obligated to go all out.

THEY WENT all out, all right. Sam was half a head taller than the swarthy ape he was matched with, but the first eight rounds the ape slapped him around pretty badly. He favored the French *savot* technique of kicking, and his target was generally Sam's groin cup. Once he landed a solid heel-blow, and Sam curled up like a pork-chop on an over-heated griddle, but the big blond rolled out of it before the count of five and kept the bout alive.

It was a ten-round affair, one of an elimination series to determine who was to meet the champ at the end of the year. Sam's extra-long reach fitted him more for a first-battering attack, and his principal liability had always been his tendency to wear out before his opponent. Throwing those huge hams of his took a lot out of him; by the time he had worn down the other fighter's guard, Sam usually didn't have enough left to finish the job.

Which is why I had chosen Sam. I liked those long, pistonarms and boulders of fists that could knock a 280-pound man flat even when they struck his guard. If only he could carry his attack the whole fight.

The ape kicked and wrestled Sam all over the circular ring for eight four-minute rounds. The ape was weakening, but it looked as if Sam was actually picking up energy. In the last two rounds, Sam finally smashed the two hairy arms into nerveless, purple logs that refused to come up any more. Then, circling like an over-grown cougar, he moved in open-palmed, swinging his hands like a pair of axes, chopping with judo blows so hard that the *chunk!* was audible over the sound of the bloodthirsty crowd. He hacked high, and when he missed the neck, it was all right, because usually he tore flesh on the ape's face.

An ear dangled, half ripped off. The ape bled from cheek, mouth, nose and brow, and twice the referee slipped on the splotched canvas that was slimy red in patches and

splattered even outside the ropes.

The ape collapsed in the last 30 seconds. He stretched out helpless and blind on his back. Sam instantly leaped high in the air and brought his heels down, stiff-legged, on the man's belly just at the diaphragm. The fight was over.

LEN AND SAM picked me up the next afternoon and drove me home from the university. The sight of Sam's face brought back the horror of the fight, but I didn't mention I had gone to the bathroom and thrown up after it was over. "Well, Sam," I said, "how do you feel?"

"T'riffic! I moidered the sap, didn't I, Len?"

Len nodded, "You sure did, champ. I guess we're hooked on, Doc. I hope you have plenty of that gunk on hand."

I assured him I could supply their needs. "Are your partners satisfied?"

"They better be!" Sam said from the back seat. "This is real livin'. Looka here, no black'n blue even."

Len was shaking his head. "I never saw anything like it. Carozzi hit him with everything but the gong, and all it did was make Sam mad."

"Sure I was mad. I allus get mad, but this bustard he kept kickin' me in the—"

"I took up a collection," Len interrupted and withdrew an envelope from his inside, coat pocket. "Four thousand, including advance payment for the next dose. We fight again in three months. Incidentally, did you notice Sam's skin? It turned a little pink last night after he swallowed the gunk you gave us."

I TURNED around and looked at the great, flat face behind me. I had noticed the faint discoloration on my TV set. "That's normal," I reassured him. "The particular size of the gold particles in last night's dose shows a pink color."

Len glanced at me sideways, "This isn't so good. Everybody knows that Sam trains strictly in gyms. He always goes into the ring looking like an egg white."

"Don't you remember?" I said. "You were out on the beach yesterday afternoon, and Sam got a little sunburned."

"Yeah, I guess that's a good enough story. Remember that, Sam; and next time, we'd better run out to the ocean for a little nap in the sun before the fight."

"That's the idea," I agreed. I invited them in for a cup of coffee when we got to my place, and this time they accepted. Sam went to sleep on my sofa while Len and I had a nice chat. As I got to know him a little he seemed quite different from his three partners. He was small-blond, gentle-voiced and mild in

manner, yet somehow he always seemed to have the final say.

"HOW WAS the purse last night?" I asked.

"Fair. A little over six thousand. Split five ways it didn't make us rich, but it'll pay expenses."

"Split five ways? And only $6000?"

"Sure. We let the kid keep a full 20% share for himself. Not much dough in the RAT game until you make the top, or get awfully popular with the TV crowd."

No wonder they had almost balked at my price of $2000 a dose! I noticed for the first time that Len never looked me in the eye; in fact, he rarely took his eyes off the floor. With his long, black lashes and smooth complexion he'd have made an attractive woman. It seemed remarkable that this mild little character was the dominant personality of the five-some.

"Of course, you always hope for the big time," he explained. "If we win the next three matches, our chance at the championship fight will net us around a hundred thousand; from there on out it's a quarter of a million plus a piece of the television."

"Sounds to me like the payoff is top-heavy." I said.

"That's to make the boys scramble and stay honest."

He sounded so sincere that for the moment I forgot that he had just paid me $4000 for two doses of illegal "tonic". Nor was I yet aware that Sam was only one of Len's stable of eight fighters—just the choice part of a rough ton of gladiatorial meat.

Len's quiet diffidence put me at ease and dissipated much of my nervousness. In my presence, at least, he always treated Sam like a son, and his general friendliness made the whole deal seem more like an informal business arrangement among buddies.

I SHOULD have placed a bet on the next fight, because after that the odds on Sam went to the devil. The colloidal tonic had an effect that any psychologist would have predicted. Secure in the conviction that he was invincible, Sam unleashed full power in the first round. Cuna, the Argentinian—like Carrozi and a majority of RAT fighters—was principally a grappler; but he never did get a hold on Sam. In the third round Cuna saw the handwriting and tried a desperate flying tackle. Sam was ready. He rabbit-punched the horizontal South American to the canvas, sat on his head and played a slow, rhythmic stacatto on Cuna's kidneys.

Months later Cuna returned to the pampas wearing a rubber tube and a bottle strapped to his leg, plus a permanently-injured sacro-iliac.

Len continued to drop by

once or twice a week, but it was a month prior to the next fight before I heard from the other partners. Vi Crousseau phoned one evening and proceeded to tell me off. "You chisler," he rasped. "You rotten, profiteering egghead! $2000 a dose for that gunk, and I got some made up for only $186—a whole quart of it!"

I almost fainted. "For God's sake don't feed it to Sam!" I yelled into the phone. "If it's straight, aqueous colloidal gold, it will precipitate out. It's lyophobic, and if it gets into his bloodstream the minerals will act as an electrolyte; Lord knows what—"

"Blow it out your test-tubes, Doc! Sam's already swallowed a full dose, and he's out inna gym sparring right now. Says he feels fine. So you can—"

HIS VOICE faded from the phone, and I heard Hanson's voice in the background. "Jeeziz, jeeziz, Sam's sick! All over the ring. Getta doc, quick!"

"Where are you?" I screamed.

After a pause Hanson came on. "That you, Doc? Can you get over to Torney's gym on 178th right away? Sam's upchoking purple and black!"

It took fifteen minutes to get a cab and another half hour to cross town. By the time I got to Sam's dressing room the crisis was over, Len and Baker had arrived and a verbal brawl was in progress.

Sam huddled in a corner, sulking over a pint of whiskey, looking like a kid who's trying to make up his mind whether the lollipop was worth the castor oil.

Len shut up his partners when I came in and took me by the arm. "Believe me, Doc, I had nothing to do with this stupid business," he said apologetically. "I can't imagine what Vi and Hanson were thinking of; you're the last person in the world we want to cross."

I WAS SO relieved that Sam was all right that I said nothing. Baker agreed with Len that Vi and Hanson had been foolish, but he wasn't so cordial. He thrust a flat, 32 oz. medicine flask at me. "Pink, colloidal gold," he said coldly, "just what Vi asked for."

I nodded. "It looks like it won't work without a certain albumin additive; *that's* my secret. A lyophobic colloid won't remain in suspension in the body, but my process changes the gold colloid to a lyophilic class—which does."

"Yah, yah, whatever that means," Hanson broke in. "We ain't arguin' that point. I just got through pumpin' Sam's stomach, so we know this gunk don't work. But the chemist said—"

Baker cut him off. "Don't you think you're kind of

knocking down pretty heavy on us, Dr. Rugg?"

"What do you mean?" I asked innocently.

"The chemist told Vi that he put in all the gold that the solution would hold, and the bill for a whole quart only came to $186. How about that?"

Len was sitting on the edge of the rub-down table swinging his legs. "The Doc told us the gold in that gunk was expensive," he said staring at the floor, "and that's good enough for me."

AS USUAL, he was making it easy for me, easy to lie my way out of this. "That's right," I said, "there *is* more gold in my colloid; a lot more. The albumin acts like a buffer, you see, and it allows a much greater charge of gold particles to remain in solution. Why this stuff," I held up the quart bottle, "this wouldn't do Sam any good even if he could hold it down."

They were all watching me except Len, and their looks told me I had better get off the defensive or I'd lose my case. "As a matter of fact," I told them, "I clear less than a hundred dollars a dose. Rest of it is all in the cost of the gold. Of course, it's your money; if you want to break off the agreement it's up to you."

Hanson, who had the best reason to know Sam's limitations, back-watered fast, and I noticed that Len was staring at him sideways from under those long, black lashes.

That wrapped it up, and the next two fights brought about a complete reversal of their suspicions that I was cheating them. After the third fight, the characteristic pink blush didn't fade away from Sam's white hide; instead it settled into a faint golden blush—near enough to a natural tan so that it wasn't questioned by the Commission. Hanson wanted to know what caused it, right away.

"Some of the gold seems to to be penetrating the pigmentation cells," I told him. "You'd better keep a sun lamp around Sam's quarters to account for it. It doesn't bother Sam, does it?"

"I should say not," Len said. "Some columnist called him 'Golden Boy' the other day, and he's beginning to get female fan mail."

I WAS SECRETLY worried about Sam's coloration. Having worked only with small, fur-bearing animals before, this development was unexpected. For one thing it meant that a large portion of the colloid was remaining in the tissues, instead of being captured and held in the bone-marrow as I had predicted. Aside from the risk of a disastrous discoloration occurring, the partners might discover that Sam really didn't

need any more of my colloid.

This last worry was unfounded. When Sam won his forth fight in the first round, and his skin darkened to a beautiful, almost translucent sun-color, Hanson, Vi and Baker made a point of stressing their confidence in me. They began kidding Sam about being worth his weight in gold, and I could see that the color of his skin had done more than my words to convince them I was really loading the gold into him.

Instead of explaining the truth I encouraged their misconception. "When he dies," I said one night, "they won't bury Sam; they'll just stack him up with the rest of the bullion at Fort Knox."

"It's mostly in his bones, huh?" Hanson said, showing a better memory than you'd expect for a muscle-tender.

"That's right," I lied. "The long bones, the arms and legs." It was more than a lie; it was a fervent wish. If the stuff kept socking into his tissues, the colloidal density in the individual muscle and skin cells would grow too great, and I'd have to stop administering it to him.

MEANWHILE, Sam had earned his chance at the Championship. The bout with Ivan, the Cossack Crusher, was set for four months, and I hoped this would be time enough for some of the gold to be excreted or deposited out in the haemoglobin where it belonged.

I brought a colorimeter home from the university and took weekly tests on Sam's skin. I tested samples of his urine and stool; I even blotted sweat from his armpits. Not a particle of the metal was escaping his body, nor was his skin fading by a single wave-length of the spectrum.

The last two weeks were a nightmare of indecision for me. It was the morning of the day of the fight before I made up my mind to refuse Sam another dose of colloid. The hell with the money! I had $8000 already, enough to really enjoy my sabbatical leave next year. And the boys would be quite pleased to save the $2000 when I told them that Sam didn't need this last dose. They had swallowed so many lies already that it didn't occur to me they would refuse to believe the truth.

All five showed up at my place an hour before the weighin, which was set for noon. Before I could open my mouth Len stared at my shoelaces and said, "Doc, we have a little favor to ask. We'll have to go on the cuff until tomorrow for this last shot of gold."

BAKER SEEMED nervous about something. He broke in, "You see, we had to raise a $20,000 bond. Ever since a contender ran out on the

champ at the last minute three years ago, the TV networks have required both contestants to post performance bonds before they'll cancel prescheduled programs and clear the air for an international hook-up. The TV rights bring in most of the gate, so we had no choice."

"It took every dime we had among us," Len concluded. "You won't mind waiting 24 hours, will you, Doc?"

Hanson filled in eagerly, "Even if we lose, we get 50 grand, Doc."

I said, "Quit worrying. I've decided Sam doesn't need any more colloid. He's loaded now, and any more—" I didn't finish because Hanson, Baker and Vi were staring at me, and Sam had a king-size handful of my shirt-front twisted until my collar was choking me.

"I told ya!" Vi said. "The second he finds out he's got us over a barrel he's gonna try to put the screws on us."

Len said, "Let go of him, Sam!" Sam did and moved around behind me out of sight.

I said, "I'm not trying to force up the price—"

"I'm disappointed in you, Doc," Len said very softly. "How much is 24-hours' credit going to cost us?"

"He doesn't *need* any more I tell you!" The door to the spare-room which I used as my home laboratory, clicked behind me, and I tried to turn, but Vi clamped his big, black hands on my shoulders. "Don't let Sam drink it," I said. "I won't be responsible if he takes any more."

"So you have the dose all made up, eh?" Baker said. "What made you change your mind at the last minute?"

VI GROWLED, "I oughta wring your scrawny neck, I ought to."

"Easy, boys," Len said. "Can you guarantee us that Sam doesn't need another dose, Doc?"

"Well, practically," I said.

"But not quite, eh?" He raised his voice slightly. "Find it, Sam?"

There was a brief silence, the thump of a bottle, and then Sam came out of the lab making his usual face over the taste and wiping his puckered mouth on his sleeve. "I drunk it," he said simply. "Let's go. I gotta weigh in."

"Good boy!" Len clapped Sam on the shoulder in his ridiculously fatherly manner. He didn't look as if he could father a marshmallow let alone a bull-necked giant like Sam.

Vi released me. "I was gonna give ya a ducat I paid a scalper fifty bucks for, but the hell with ya!" he said, and they were gone.

AT EIGHT o'clock that night Sam's massive body shone from my 48-inch TV screen like a smoky sun in

the image of a man. The bright lights shimmered from his lightly oiled skin as his robe dropped off, and a thousand females, old enough to know better, shrieked like bobby-soxers. The announcer remarked on the potent sex appeal of the challenger's magnificent physique, the gong chimed and bald-headed Ivan, the Cossack Crusher, danced out to his doom.

To everyone's surprise, the Russian grappler completely reversed his normal grab-throw-and-stomp technique. He lunged at Sam with bunched fists and began swinging. He was going to try beating Sam at his own game, and it wasn't bad strategy at all, because Sam had had very little necessity in the past of defending himself against his own type of battering attack.

The two monsters smashed at each other fist to fist for a dozen blows, then Sam did a peculiar thing. He dropped to his knees and tried a disabling but dangerous ankle-twist. Had he succeeded in breaking Ivan's ankle, he could have assured victory, but the Russian instantly demonstrated why this attack is so seldom used. As Sam's head went down, Ivan's toe came up, full into Sam's right eye. His head snapped up and down, he went to his belly and Ivan fell on top with both fists stabbing into Sam's kidneys.

Sam's bellow of pain brought a poetic pleasure to Ivan's face. It was Carrozi's smashed kidneys Ivan obviously had in mind as he worked over Sam's back. That had not been a polular victory for our boy.

Sam finally rolled free pawing at his eyes. His right one was almost closed from the kick, and the left was watering so badly he could scarcely see.

IVAN POISED for the kill then stopped. He stepped back, cocked his head at Sam and begun to laugh. The TV camera shifted views for a close-up of Sam's body, and the source of Ivan's amusement became visible.

Every spot on the gleaming gold body where Ivan had struck a fair blow was marked in a vivid, dark purple. The skin across his lower back was nearly black, and his whole torso resembled an overripe, slightly rotten banana. My vague fears had come true before my eyes. The epidermal cells of Sam's body were overloaded with the colloid, and the hammering was welding the malleable gold-dust into larger particles in a sort of physical precipitation. The weak negative charges and dispersing action of the Brownian movement were no match for Ivan's mail-like fists.

The announcer's throat-mike rattled with excitement

as Ivan pointed to Sam, threw back his head and roared with laughter. Finally clearing his one good eye, Sam looked down at himself, flushed a crimson that ran down into his neck and staggered forward.

A minute later, the Russian lay on the canvas dying from a ruptured spleen.

Four minutes later my phone rang, and Hanson whispered hoarsely, "Will a blood test show up any gold on Sam?"

I said yes.

FORTY-EIGHT minutes later I refused to answer my door-bell. That was when Vi Crousseau kicked down the door, and all five men pushed into my living room.

Len was behind Sam, with a gun pushed into the fighter's back, but he was ghost-white, and his eyes still wouldn't come up to mine. His left hand rested on Sam's shoulder as if to reassure him, and Sam needed it. His eyes were glazed with terror, and his mouth was open.

The other three were wide-eyed and breathing fast. Baker said, "The Russian's dead. The Commission's suspicious of Sam because he turned color, and they took blood samples before they let him go. Hanson says you said the blood would show gold, and that hangs us; first degree murder with conspiracy. That's what Houkinek and his boys got last year when he killed young Tierney, and they found his fists injected."

"We're headin' for Canada," Vi said, "and we need dough."

"Commission's holding up the purse and our bond until they investigate the Russian's death," Hanson said "We're broke, clean, strapped. Break out your small change, Doc."

I couldn't speak. I handed over my billfold. Len moved his head a little sideways. "Don't think we're blaming you, Doc," he said in that quiet voice of his. "You tried to warn us. We wouldn't come to you like this, but we don't dare go near our own flats. By now, the press will know that the commission is suspicious; and if they catch up to us we'll never shake them again."

I managed to say, "I'm sorry, fellows. I *did* try to warn you."

"Never mind the regrets," Vi grunted. "Have you got four suitcases, bags, any kind of luggage?"

I RUMMAGED out four bags from my closets. "That's all I have," I appologized. "Don't you need one for Sam?"

Vi flashed his white teeth against his black lips. "They're all for him," he said with a smile I'll never forget. "Let's take the bags in here, huh? No use messing up Doc's livingroom."

He grabbed Sam's arm and

towed him toward my laboratory herding me ahead of them with his gun. Len followed behind Sam, his head bowed.

As I backed into the lab I said, "What do you want in here? I don't have any more gold on the place."

"How wrong you are!" Vi said in that husky hiss.

"You mean a check?" I said. "Sure I'll write you a check, but—"

"That's right," Baker said, "but we couldn't cash it."

"Got any ether?" Hanson asked looking at my shelves.

Suddenly I understood. These men were desperate, and they were really broke. My billfold had produced only $20. "Oh, God no! You don't mean *that?*"

"You're the doctor," Baker said. "Where's the either and the knives?"

THEY THOUGHT that Sam was really loaded with gold. I had sold them a bill of goods, telling them that I made less than a hundred dollars a shot. That would leave five times $1900 worth of gold by their arithmetic—or some $9500 buried in their fighter, their glorious, purple, worthless, condemned fighter.

Hanson was rummaging about in a flat drawer where I kept my little dissecting scalpels. He swore disgustedly. "I'd take all night with these." He went out to the kitchen and came back with my largest carving knife and the steel hone.

"Len!" I said. "Wake up, man! You aren't going to let them do this to your boy?"

His eyes remained on the small of Sam's back, and he shrugged. I stared at the black pistols in Vi's and Baker's hands. I didn't dare tell them that there was less than $300 worth of gold in Sam's body, and that it would take a commercial laboratory to separate it from its diffusion into his tissues. They believed me on the amount and they believed that it was located mainly in his bones—the long bones of his arms and legs!

"Len," I said, "you're the boss. Didn't you hear the fantastic idea these fellows have?"

Then he raised his head, and for the first time I looked into the dead mackerel eyes that lived under his long lashes.

"Sure, Doc; it was my idea," he said softly. "I'll have a drumstick." With his left hand still on Sam's shoulder he raised his right, nuzzled the bore of the .38 to the base of Sam's skull and pulled the trigger.

Someone—I think it was Hanson—slipped the cool, ivory grip of the carving knife between my limp fingers.

★

For every kind of child, there is the problem of winning acceptance from his fellows, finding his own kind . . .

illustrated by ORBAN

The Gardener

by Raymond F. Jones

(author of "The Non-Statistical Man")

JIMMY CORRELL hated the smell of schools. The papery smell of worn books, the smell of chalk dust and teachers' perfumes and the oily sweeping compound Mr. Barton brushed over the wooden floors each night. The choking smell of two many sweaty jeans crowded together on these hot, spring days.

This odor of learning flowed through the halls of Westwod High and pooled in the big auditorium wing that would soon be filling for the Friday Assembly. Mr. Barton was already opening the high windows against it. Jimmy put his head through the partly open doorway and watched the custodian's angular form moving along the wall.

Mr. Barton knew the scores of all the games Westwood had played since he came there in '31. He punched the boys on the biceps, and roared loudly when he won over them in arguments as to who beat whom in which year. Except that he never punched Jimmy's arm. He spoke softly and tousled Jimmy's hair. Sometimes Jimmy thought Mr. Barton was the only friend he had—besides Brick Malloy, of course.

He backed from the door and closed it quietly. He

wished he could call out and tell Mr. Barton what he was doing, but no one must see him now.

A bell shrilled. The five-minute, between-class period was over. Jimmy raced to the end of the hall and slipped out to the bike rack. He unlocked his own bicycle quickly and sped away from the school yard.

HE DIDN'T stop his frantic pumping until he reached the bridge across Willow Creek, nearly two miles from Westwood High. His breath coming in deep gasps, he got off and walked his bike down the steep slope to a hiding place under the bridge. Then he moved along the bank on which the spring grass was already high, half hiding the old trails. At last he stopped, a half mile from the bridge, under the great, shadowy arms of a willow tree. The grass was shorter here in the shade. Jimmy dropped face down to its green softness.

For a long time he didn't move. He was safe. He knew it couldn't last, but that didn't matter. He was safe for today —Jimmy Correll Day at Westwood High. It would be all over before they found him.

Inside, he felt like crying, but it wouldn't come. Jimmy Correll Day! They called it his day and gave him an assembly to honor him. And the whole school despised him—all but Mr. Barton and Brick Malloy.

In panic, he thought of sitting up there on the stage while Mr. Mooremeister, the Principal, said fine, flowery things he didn't mean. He thought, too, of what his disappearance would do to his mother and father, who were going to sit on the stage with him. But he couldn't help it; they expected too much.

He moved over to the edge of the creek and watched the deep, clear water slide past the bank. This was the spot where Brick had taught him how to fish. Maybe he shouldn't have come here. If they should ask Brick— But they wouldn't get around to that until it was much too late. A couple of hours was all he needed.

He took off his shoes and socks and let his feet hang in the cool water. He wished he could make them understand that this was where he belonged, with the Earth and the water and the wild growth along the banks of the stream.

Maybe if they let him alone he could have found a place for himself at school, too, but they wouldn't let him alone. He was in the first grade a week when they promoted him to third. He stayed there a month. After that, he wasn't considered as belonging to any particular grade. He just moved from room to room, soaking up everything

the books and teachers had to show him.

Now—next Fall—they wanted him to go to the University.

HE HAD WON a four-year scholarship from the Martindale Electric Company in their annual Junior Scientist Contest. He had submitted his astronomy project and written an essay on Space, the Next Frontier. The judges said it was the best thing they had seen since the contest began.

He hadn't dreamed it might mean that they wouldn't even let him finish high school. But Mr. Dunlap, of the Martindale Company, wanted him in the University next Fall. Dr. Webber, President of the University, wanted him also. Dr. Webber had kept an eye on him since the first reports of his genius started coming out of Lincoln grade school.

And Mr. Mooremeister wanted it. Mr. Mooremeister, most of all. *He'd be tickled to death to be rid of me*, Jimmy thought.

The memory of his first meeting with the Principal was like a hard lump inside Jimmy. It was on the day Mr. Gibbons, Principal of Lincoln, brought Jimmy to Westwood. He was left in the little anteroom while the two men talked. The partition was thick, but that made no difference. Jimmy didn't need to hear their words to know everything that was in their minds.

He hadn't been able to do it very long at that time, and it still frightened him a little. It was one of the things he'd never told anyone about. He couldn't make it work always, either, but now this ability was functioning perfectly. It was as if he were right inside the skulls of the two men.

MR. MOORMEISTER groaned in misery when Mr. Gibbons explained why he had come. "Not a cute little boy genius, Gibbons!" he cried. Anything but that! Our football team hasn't a single decent quarterback; our English staff is going to pieces. And you want me to wet nurse a little genius!

"Send him down to Smithers at Central. Smithers *likes* wonder boys who can sit motionless for a day at a time and recite all of 'Hamlet' from memory."

"You've got to take him," Mr. Gibbons said. "He knows more than half my teachers do. He's in your district; and Webber at the University has an eye on him."

"Then let Webber take him! I don't want him!"

"That'll come in a year or two. But he doesn't think Jimmy is old enough for University environment right now."

"Not at nine, but at ten or

eleven he will be," said Mr. Mooremeister sarcastically.

"Yes." Then Mr. Gibbons was silent for quite a while before he said slowly, "Jimmy's a queer little cuss. You can't get close enough to really know him, but somehow I think he's going to become a very great man. It may turn out that the most valuable thing you or I can do in our otherwise not-very-useful lives is to see that the thing Jimmy has inside him is not smothered before it matures."

JIMMY couldn't remember when he first heard the word, prodigy. It was certainly long before his school days, but he hadn't been concerned with its meaning then. He didn't suppose he was different from other children.

Now he wondered if he had any chance at all to ever be like them.

He remembered the precise moment he found out there was a difference.

In the first grade, Miss Brown printed "run" on the blackboard that first day of school. She took three ridiculous steps to show its meaning. And in midmorning then, Jimmy rose and solemnly announced: "But I already know how to read. I've always been able to read."

He began a recital of the long list of classics, science texts, and Donald Duck comics through which he'd gone with the patient help and guidance of his father. In the midst of it he stopped. Something like a cold wind swept about his feet; Miss Brown and the children were looking at him, utterly silent.

Instinctively, he understood what he had done. He was a strange one in their midst, an outsider; and they hated him for it.

That was what he felt swirling coldly in that room, he knew forever after. The dark penalty of hate for one who was different. He cried in the night when he got to bed. He cried for the immense, nameless ache that had opened up within him.

His mother rocked him in her arms, and his father said it must have been the excitement of the first day at school. They tried to persuade him to tell what was the matter. But he had no words for it.

He stood at the mouth of the great, empty cavern of his life and saw all the dark, lonely years stretching away into timelessness. But he had not the words for it, then or ever.

HE COULD not remember the beginning of wonder, of his great yearning inquiry about the stars and the Earth, the water and the air, and the things that crawled and swam and flew. It was a magic place, this world to which he had come!

And he had always, from the moment of his birth, been

able to know everything he wanted to know about it for little more than the asking. Truly, he could not remember learning to read. At the first glimpse of a printed page he had known. But after that first day of school he never told them, not even his parents, about the things he could do that other boys could not do at all.

He remembered the first time in science class, for instance, when he had been shown a microscope along with the rest of the pupils. It had seemed such a useless object! By narrowing his vision a bit he could see clearly the wriggly amoeba in the little drop of water. But by then he understood he was the only one in the class who could.

He knew they didn't understand about the stars, either. He read in his books about great telescopes that men built to stretch their puny vision to the threshhold of space. But since infancy—he couldn't recall the first time—he had strolled in vision across the stifling red sands of Mars. He had picked his way among the ancient ruins and played hide and seek in imagination with the small, brown cubs that scurried there, the only remnants of the proud, fallen race that had built those ruins.

He knew he was the only one who could do these things. And he despised himself for it, for what was the use of such gifts if they shut him in a sealed tomb that kept him out of the life and friendship of his own kind?

So, carefully, he hid all his strange, wild talents as best he could. But he could not hold himself to the pace of his fellow school pupils by any means at his command. It was impossible to camouflage himself as a common dullard.

He knew he wasn't normal. Sometimes he wondered if he was even human...

IN THAT first year of school, Miss Brown spread the word, and Mr. Gibbons came to see Jimmy's genius for himself. They sent him on, out of the first grade, and that's the way it began.

He became a kind of celebrated freak, but only Mr. Gibbons showed any genuine liking for him. Other teachers never did. His fellow pupils regarded him with a kind of curious contempt. Jimmy had hoped it would turn out differently when he got to know them. But it took him such a long time to get acquainted, and he was shunted to a new group before he had time to know the last one.

As the gap in ages widened, he gave it up. He never had a classmate for a friend. Not until Brick Malloy.

In the archives of the University there was a bound, typewritten manuscript, a full inch and a half thick, devot-

ed to a description and analysis of Jimmy Correll. It had earned its author, Ralph Grosset, a master's degree in psychology and had given Jimmy a whole summer with someone to talk to.

Ralph Grosset had described in detail Jimmy's photographic memory and his adult capacity for deductive reasoning, but he had skipped the things Jimmy tried to say about the wonder and the mystery of the universe, and of hating and the loneliness. He didn't know about these things. He was interested only in preparing a thesis for his degree, and he didn't really like Jimmy. Grosset feared him a little, almost, and distrusted him.

Jimmy didn't really expect anything different. He had given up long ago and learned to give coldness for coldness, retreating farther and farther into the clean little world of his own making. But it was lonely there.

It was so lonely that he could stand it no longer.

HE DREW his legs out of the chill water of the Creek and stretched them in a spot of sunlight filtering through the tree. He lay on his back staring upward at the sky through the net of willows. He was sure of one thing: He wasn't going to the University next Fall.

He knew what it would be like there. They would laugh when he first came into class and tell him the kindergarten was three doors down the hall. The professors would make a joke of his presence even while trying to reassure him it was normal for eleven year old boys to appear in their lecture rooms. They wouldn't like him.

And all of them would talk over his head about the ordinary affairs of life, the football games, the dances and the parties, the world he didn't belong in. They would look through him and around him as if to rid themselves of his presence by sheer disbelief in him.

That's the way it had been at Westwood. He had been afraid, and the rest knew it instantly and without mercy. They called him "Professor" and "Four-Eyes" until he wanted to scream in rage.

He hated the gym periods most of all. The white, suffocating steaminess of the dressing room made him gasp and go sick with nausea. He hated the smell of sweat and clothes and dirty shoes. The wild, dark hairiness of the surrounding bodies frightened him and made him ashamed of his own baby nakedness.

And the others were ashamed to have him in their midst. Sometimes they kidded brutally about his little white skinny body, but mostly they just pretended he wasn't there. On the field, of course, when sides were chosen for baseball

or soccer, he was automatically the last one left. Nobody ever really chose him. When all the others had been picked the crowd ran for positions, would trail along with the side due to get the last man.

BUT IN THE early Fall of this year the miracle had happened. Jimmy found a friend. Old Mr. Barton was his friend, of course, but Mr. Barton was everybody's friend. It was different with Brick Malloy. Brick was a classmate. Captain of the football team.

Jimmy could walk with his head high when he was with Brick. Everybody called out and waved when Brick passed. The greetings were not for Jimmy, but he knew the others were watching as he moved by the side of his friend. There had grown, day by day, a new look in their eyes. At first puzzlement—and now almost acceptance and respect.

Jimmy had not hoped for so much when Brick first came to him. He was rude and bitter as he was to everyone then. Brick seemed not to notice. "I'm in trouble, Jimmy," he said. "You're the best man around here for my kind of trouble, if you'd be willing to help me out."

Jimmy remembered Brick had never called him "Professor" or "Four-eyes", and he'd never laughed at him in the dressing room. Brick was always so sure of making his own way he never needed to stand in anyone else's.

"I'm going to flunk trig," he went on, "unless I get somebody to beat it into my thick head. I don't have enough time to do it alone. It looks like it's got to be either football or trig—and the way I'm going it's not likely to be either"

Without enthusiasm, Jimmy took on the coaching job. Trigonometry was lucidly clear to him, and he had the knack of making it so for the older boy. Brick offered substantial payment, but at the end of the first week, when the warmth was already growing betwen them, Jimmy made his own proposal.

"I'm in trouble, too," he said. "I want to learn to throw a ball halfway straight, so the guys will quit razzing me in gym. I want to learn how to catch and run. Teach me these things, will you, Brick?"

THEY MADE a deal to exchange coaching, and Jimmy began feeling a measure of control coming into the muscles of his lean body. For the first time he felt his body was his own, with the right to occupy its quota of space. He had a right to the wild playground skills of his companions. Brick respected him and taught him to have respect for himself.

And one day, in this same spot, Jimmy confided the

great secret of his agonizing wonder about the universe to which they had come. Jimmy had caught his first fish, and in the sky, the sun was pinking the high cirrus.

They watched the color slowly fading. "Don't you ever wonder about it?" Jimmy said.

"Wonder about what?"

"Everything...!" And then it came with a burst, the outflow of talk so long held back, because there had been no one to understand it.

"The colors," said Jimmy, "The colors in the sunrise and sunset, the colors in a rainbow, the blue of the sky. Out in space, away from Earth, the sky isn't blue. It's black. Did you know that, Brick? Someday I'm going out there. I'm going to walk on the Moon and see what Earth looks like from there. I'm going to go to Mars before I die.

"I'm going to find out why an atom explodes. Nobody knows that, yet. Not really. They don't know what fission or fusion really is. They only know a little about how to make it happen. Nobody knows what's really inside an atom. I'm going to find out, Brick."

"SURE YOU are," said Brick quietly. "You're going to go farther and faster, and higher and deeper than most men have ever dreamed."

"What are you going to do, Brick? Wouldn't you like to go there, too? Down into an atom, or out into space?"

"Me? The trig hound of Westwood High? Dad's got a place all ready for me in his contracting business. I expect to be a civil engineer, that is if I can ever learn which end of a transit you look into."

"Is that what you want to do?"

"Sure. I grew up on stories of bridges in South America and sewers in Syria. Actually, Dad's never had an out of stages job yet. His biggest one was a thirty six inch sewer line half way across San Francisco. He had to start too close to scratch. He expects me to build it up; it's what I want to do.

"And a guy ought to do what he wants to, not what somebody else thinks he ought to. You've got a lot tougher climb than I have to get where you're going. But maybe not, really. You're starting from a higher jumping-off place than most of us will ever reach after a lifetime of trying."

"Is that why they hate me?"

Brick's eyes widened in astonishment. "So that's what's eating you! For the love of Pete, stop dreaming up such crazy ideas. They'd like you well enough if you'd give them half a chance!"

JIMMY KNEW that was a lie, of course. Reclining now in the grass where they

had once talked, he knew that Brick was just trying to be kind. He had given them a chance until his heart ached with the sickness of longing for their friendship. Still they hated him, and Jimmy was scared of them.

He was too scared to appear for the farce of Jimmy Correll Day Assembly. He was too scared to go to the University next year.

He was too scared to leave Brick.

He wasn't ashamed of this. For the first time in his life he knew what it was like to walk throught the school yard and on the streets of his neighborhood with some feeling of pride and freedom from fear. Brick gave him an honest friendship. It wasn't shameful to take pride in that —and fear its loss.

Maybe if he stayed at Westwood just this next year—with Brick—he could get up strength enough to go it alone. But if he had to leave now for another world of taunting strangers he would be lost. He would never find his way back to this world of sky and light that Brick had shown him.

He stopped thinking and let time drift while he sucked in the pleasure of the water and the sky, and the gentle fondling of the wind in the grass and the willow branches. And then he knew it had happened, the thing he had known would happen because he was foolish enough to come back to this enchanted place.

Brick was there, standing over him.

JIMMY LOOKED up to his friend's face. A beam of light through the matrix of leaves blinded him. Brick sat down on the bank. "They're looking all over for you, Jimmy," he said.

A hot burning flooded the inside of Jimmy's stomach. They couldn't have searched very long. "Why did you look here?" he said.

"I guess I always knew this would happen," Brick said slowly. He plucked at the blades of grass on the bank. "I guess I always knew you'd run out when the big chance came along. It's all you've ever done—run away."

"You can't taunt me into going back!" Jimmy said numbly. "I won't go back, no matter what you say."

"I don't expect you to. I just thought it would be a good time to tell you what I've always suspected: You haven't got what it takes."

"I know what I'm doing!" Jimmy moved to a crouching position before Brick, his childish face almost snarling. "Nobody's going to make me jump through a hoop like a prize dog anymore. Jimmy Correll, the trained pup, is through performing!"

Brick leaned back, smiling cynically.

"Brick—all I want is a chance to stay at Westwood another year." The words tumbled out of Jimmy. "You don't know what it's meant—being able to talk to you and walk around the school as if I have a right to. If I can just hold off one more year maybe I can make it. But I can't now. Can't you understand that? Besides—you'll be going to the University then, too."

Brick moved away. "Don't count on me, kid. I left an hour ago. I had thought that if I waited long enough you might show some guts. You were able to learn to catch a fast pitch, and you let me rub your nose in the dirt teaching you to run with a ball. But I guess it takes still more in a pinch like this. You haven't got it, and you never will."

Jimmy's face twisted helplessly. "Brick—Brick—"

"It's about time you got wise to yourself. You can't hang onto me any longer. You've got to get up gumption enough to face things for yourself. Find your own kind."

"Damn you, Brick Malloy—damn you—!"

But Brick had turned and was already vanishing in the high grass along the bank.

THE ENCHANTMENT was gone. Never would this be a sacred, wonderful spot again. Jimmy lay in the grass for long minutes, trying to get it all back again. But he knew it was gone now forever.

He got up and moved along the trail. There was no use staying. When Brick got back to school they'd send somebody after him. His parents, or the Principal, or somebody...

He came in sight of the bridge and looked up. They had already come. It didn't seem as if there had been time for Brick to get back and report, but there was a car there on the shoulder of the road, just off the bridge.

Then Jimmy recognized it. The battered old car belonged to Mr. Barton, the janitor. Surely Mr. Barton wouldn't be the one to come and bring him back! That would be the final betrayal.

Mr. Barton was waiting on the front seat, smoking a pipe. The door hung open, moving slightly with a creak in the breeze.

The janitor waved a hand as he saw him. "Hello, Jimmy. Want to ride back with me? We can put your bike in the back."

Jimmy came up to the running board and stared in bitterness. "I guess Brick told everybody what I did."

"I wouldn't know; I haven't seen Brick."

"Then how did you know I'd be here? Why did you come?"

"I just sort of guessed. And I supposed you were ready to

go back by now so I thought I'd drive down."

Tears started suddenly in Jimmy's eyes. He leaned forward pleadingly. "Don't take me back! Drive me away from here somewhere where I'll never have to come back!"

"All right. We'll go for a ride if you want to," said Mr. Barton amiably. "Let's get your bike up in the back."

IN A FEW moments the ancient car was chugging down the road away from town and Westwood High. Mr. Barton said nothing, continuing to puff on the pipe between his teeth. Then suddenly Jimmy was pouring it out, the whole story from the very beginning in the first grade. He told about the loneliness of being different, the hatred from those who were so perfectly normal, the insurmountable dread of facing all his enemies at the Assembly in his honor.

"I'm nothing but a freak!" he cried in anguish. "I'm smarter than any of them in school and nobody'll be my friend!"

Mr. Barton nodded serenely, then spoke. "You have to decide which of two things you want. Is it the stars and atoms you are always talking about—or is it the backslapping of the guys in school, guys like Tom Marlow maybe, and Jack Foster? You can have one or the other but not both.

"Tom and Jack and the rest of them will never savvy the Jimmy Correll who gets half sick with wanting to be out there in space, walking across the face of the Moon, digging up the ancient cities of Mars. They laugh at things like that because they're afraid to look so high or so far.

"But they'll slap you on the back if you give up all that and become like them."

"I *want* to be like them! Why can't I? And keep the other, too? What's the matter with me that I can't be like the other guys, so they'll stop hating me and be friends?"

"You can, Jimmy. Just close your eyes to the things you see, which no one else can. Close your ears to the sounds that only you can hear. Laugh at their stupid jokes. Then you'll be one of them, and they won't laugh at you any more. Is that what you want?"

"Yes," said Jimmy thinly. "I want them to like me and play with me and stop hating me."

"Wouldn't you miss watching Ruffy and his friends? Wouldn't you miss the sunsets on the desert of Loh-Khita?"

JIMMY TURNED slowly to the old man. A sudden finger of chill traced its way along his spine. He felt cold and frightened all over. "How do you know about Ruffy?" he whispered hoarsely. "How do

you know about the desert of Loh-Khita? They're on Mars!"

Mr. Barton nodded. "Yes, I know. You haven't answered my question, though. Could you give up those? Could you give up watching the Earthshine from Mare Imbrium and exploring the ruins of the illfated Mars colony on the moon? Would you abandon those ancient vessels standing in the pumice of Mare Serenetatis in exchange for a backslap from Tom Marlow?"

"How do you know about them?" Jimmy's voice was a cry of torment.

"I see them, too," said Mr. Barton quietly.

"Then you're—you're like me!"

"Yes. I can see out there without a telescope. I can see the little things in a drop of water. I can know the thoughts of men before they speak them."

Suddenly Jimmy was sobbing in deep, sweet relief of all his anguish. "I thought I was alone!" he cried. "I thought I was all alone in the whole wide world!"

"You've never been alone," said Mr. Barton. "Not since the moment of your birth. We have watched over you carefully all the way."

JIMMY'S CRYING subsided and he looked up again in wonder and incredulity at the face of the old janitor. "Who?" he said in a whisper. "Who has watched over me?"

"Your own kind. Not all men are born blind and deaf and dumb as are the normal people of human society. But there have been many generations of those who are not—and who were crushed and destroyed just as you might have been.

"We are like seeds of forest giants, drifted by the wind to a tangled jungle. The seeds germinate in the viney, strangling growth, but the immature plant is robbed of its sustenance and smothered by the wealth of inferior growth.

"So it is with human beings. A 'superior' creature is still an immature creature during childhood and can be crushed by the swarms of normal beings whose potentialties are only a thousandth part of his. You have learned already to submit to those who are less than you are. You have been almost willing to give up your great gifts just to win approval from your classmates."

"But that was before I knew about you!" Jimmy cried. "It was because I was so lonely. I couldn't stand it, being the only one—"

Mr. Barton nodded. "I know. That's the way it was with me. The seedling of even the greatest forest giant requires nourishment and protection during its stage of immaturity. Otherwise, it can survive only if it takes root

where no competing cover exists.

"It happened that way to us a few times. That's how we got our start. Now it's no longer necessary to wait for that. We do a good job of—let us say, gardening. We hold back the jungle until the seedling gets a growth that will withstand any attack. You might call me a gardener."

JIMMY CONTINUED to stare at his old friend. The things he said began to fall into place, to make sense in his mind. He recalled how it had been. His reading had always been with him. That was an easy one, apparently. But he'd never known microscopic vision before he went to school. He'd seen the deserts of Mars and the white plains of the Moon for longer, though. And his ability to know the thoughts of others was still a stumbling, uncertain skill that was scarcely under his control at all.

He could understand what Mr. Barton meant. He was developing the skills of Homo Superior, but he was still a child, a growing, immature thing. And the adults of Homo Normal—even their children!—were capable of defeating him in his present stage, if he had to go it alone...

But he wasn't! He never would be alone again! He looked up to the face of Mr. Barton with tears starting in his eyes all over again. "Tell me about the rest of them," he whispered. "Where are they? How can I find them?"

The janitor shook his head. "That must wait. You are not ready to be moved yet—to be transplanted, shall we say? You will go on to the University as they desire you to. You will live out your seedling time here where you have been planted. But you need have no fear of what Normals can do. You need have no longing to give up your gifts just to win their friendship. You can be yourself and grow in your own way for there will always be—a gardener—nearby to guide you when the jungle threatens to smother you."

Jimmy had not noticed until now, but they had driven around by the Creek Loop and were now approaching town again. Westwood High loomed in the foreground. Jimmy felt a pang of regret as he sensed that the interview was closed and Mr. Barton was once more just the high school janitor. With longing, he wondered how many years it would take him to be ready for *them* to invite him to—wherever they were...

Mr. Barton parked the car and got out. "Just about Assembly time, I guess, Jimmy. We'll have to hurry."

THE SUN seemed terribly bright in his eyes and he

blinked against it. Walking behind the stooped, slouching figure of the janitor, he wondered for a moment if he'd actually heard the things he r e m e m b e r e d or if he'd dreamed them. But it was no dream—Mr. Barton knew Ruffy, and the desert of Loh-Khita.

They entered the building, and all of a sudden Jimmy hated himself for intensely for trying to bridge the gap between Tom Marlow and the stars. Tom would grow up to be a truck driver, and would hardly care if the stars shone in the sky or not.

What was it Brick had said? *Find your own kind.* That was it. That was the secret. Be patient. Lincoln and Westwood were not the whole of creation. Outside, in the rest of the world, were the scattering of others like him, lonely as he was lonely. Someday he would go to them, and his l o n e l i n e s s would be over.

But loneliness wasn't the most terrible thing in the world. The stars were lonely, too, he thought, and men envy their glory.

He moved through the hall toward the back of the stage. The auditorium was filling and a few of the crowd yelled out as he passed through. "Nice goin' Professor!"

He scarcely heard the hated nickname.

Then he was in the semi-darkness of the stage wings and almost ran into Mr. Mooremeister, who was pacing the stage in angonized indecision. "You—Jimmy!" he cried. "Where in Heaven's name have you been? Your parents are frantic. We'd looked all over..."

"I didn't feel so good. I had to get away. I'm sorry if I caused any trouble."

"Trouble..." the Principal muttered. He took Jimmy severely by the arm and led him out and up to the office. "Trouble..."

HIS MOTHER and father were there. They made it easy for him. They saw his face, streaked and tearful and grasped his feelings without a word being said. Mr. Mooremeister continued to mutter about the annoyance of the situation.

Mr. Dunlap and Dr. Webber were curious, aware that events were taking place below their level of comprehension.

Jimmy went to the boys' room to wash and comb his hair. Then he was back on the stage, where the others had gathered, whispering in quiet urgency.

Beyond the curtains the roar of the assembling students almost filled him with the old panic. But he remembered the words of Mr. Barton, and it subsided. He parted the curtains and peered through a narrow slit. In a way, he could feel sorry for

them now. He knew where they were going. They would be politicians and jet pilots and engineers.

But none would share his great wonder about how the universe was put together, or his great power to find out. He'd have to make it plain to them, all that he found out. It was still their world as well as his. They had a right to know about it.

MR. MOOREMEISTER gave a choppy wave of his hand to Mr. Barton, and the heavy new curtain slid open with a hissing of the runners. The Principal marched with a pompous gait to the front center of the stage. Jimmy followed, his head up and eyes bright. The others came behind him.

Everyone remained standing while the band played the school song and the Star Spangled Banner, and Jimmy saw out of the corner of his eye that the rest of the stage had filled. Mr. Lawson was there. He was the physics teacher who sold insurance on the side. Jimmy didn't know what he was going to do on the program. And then Jimmy's heart did a triple beat. Brick had come in and was taking his place at the rear of the stage.

He had forgotten that Brick was scheduled to talk. Brick was representing the student body in paying tribute to Jimmy. What a tribute that would be! Brick hated him for a coward now. He had to get to Brick and tell him things had changed, that nothing was the way it had been a short time ago. But there was no chance. Mr. Mooremeister was rising and beginning his speech. "Friends, students, teachers, and parents..."

There were quite a few parents in the audience. They were smiling and nodding with pleased expressions in the back rows. Jimmy recognized Mrs. Parks, his Sunday School teacher. Almost all the neighbors on the block had come.

"...you know the story of Jimmy Correll," Mr. Mooremeister's solemn voice went on. "I don't have to retell it, though it's a story that's worth retelling. I want to say again how proud we are, the city of Murrayton, the schools, Lincoln and Westwood, where Jimmy has attended. I want to say how proud I am to have known and understood something of the genius we are privileged to have in our midst. The genius of Jimmy Correll."

JIMMY FELT he could forgive Mr. Mooremeister for saying these things he didn't mean, though he wished just a little bit that Mr. Mooremeister did really mean them. But it didn't really matter any more. The Principal was just a grown-up Tom Mar-

low, and Jimmy didn't have to hate any of them now.

He only had to tell them. He'd have to tell them and make them understand what the miracle of the stars was like. He'd have to touch their hearts and their minds with the incredible glory of the atom, and show them the wonder of space and night and the infinities of time.

Brick was rising now. He came slowly the long way around the rows of chairs and his eyes were steady on Jimmy's face as he came. He paused in front of Jimmy and took his hand.

Jimmy swallowed hard and half rose in his chair. "Brick..."

"It's all right," Brick whispered. "I said some things I shouldn't have. But you came back; that's all that matters. We'll get together when this is over..."

He turned and faced the students. "There's not much anyone like me can say about a guy like Jimmy. The main thing I want to say is that Jimmy has been my friend, and I am very proud of this. I hope I have been a friend to Jimmy. Most of you know what Jimmy has done for me. I wasn't blessed with an oversupply of brains, and he's tried to make up the difference during football season. It's been a wonderful experience for me. I'd like to think of Jimmy as my own kid brother. I like to think of him as one of the closest friends I've got."

THERE SEEMED to be an enormous filling and swelling in his chest. He blinked to keep the picture of the audience clear in his eyes. He didn't see any of the hate now that had so long believed was there. Maybe it never had been there at all, as Brick had tried to tell him.

This is the way it would always be, though, he thought. He would never find many who would put their arms around him and slap him on the back and laugh at *his* jokes. They would do this kind of thing. They would put him up before them and give him honors and speeches. It was the only kind of thing they knew how to do for one like him.

He looked down at the individual faces. They were sober and sincere in agreement with the things Brick was saying. They meant the honors they offered. And then Jimmy turned sharply to the man beside him. Mr. Mooremeister had reached out and patted the back of his hand. The Principal's eyes were on Brick and he was nodding and smiling happily at the boy's awkward speech.

Then Jimmy felt a burst of overwhelming realization. Mr. Mooremeister really meant it, too!

"Jimmy lives in a world you

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GAG RULE

by Thomas N. Scortia

(author of "Fulfillment")

illustrated by Murphy

A whole planetful of practical jokers isn't anyone's idea of fun, but Duval wasn't out for fun. He was out for monopoly, if he could survive a this-will-kill-you gag!

GOR leROG, who looked much like a white rabbit clad in a checked waistcoat, insisted on shaking hands.

Duval knew what that meant; he looked at the two men, seated on cushions on the far side of the foot high lacquered table, and grimaced. Then he gritted his teeth and touched flesh.

A fat blue spark flashed in the subdued light of the room. The shock brought him to his knees in pain. A gleam of moronic amusement flickered in Gor leRog's slit-pupiled eyes. "Hah, hah!" Duval laughed, nursing his burned hand.

"Smell?" he invited, offering the plastic daisy in his lapel to leRog.

Gor leRog leaned forward and Duval pressed the lever, concealed in his pocket. The flower sprayed bright red paint in the alien's rabbit face. It dribbled slowly downward, parting in two thick streams around the pink nose.

"Hah, hah," Gor leRog laughed. "Is so funny."

Duval shivered. *Completely undisciplined,* he thought.

HUMOR WAS like a narcotic to the Vachii. In their whole history, they'd never developed such a concept; the first landing of the Earthmen, a decade ago, had been a revelation. The idea had swept the planet like a virulent epidemic.

Imagine, Duval thought, *a world of idiot jokesters!*

Here was a whole planet, buying thumb tacks for chairs, exploding cigars,

The flower sprayed paint into the alien's eyes.

(they'd learned to smoke just for that one), sneezing powder, false noses...

"Our *Spurtsy-Daisy*," Duval said, gesturing at the paint-spraying flower. "My company can offer immediate delivery of ten thousand gross. The cargo ships are orbiting at this moment."

The two other men rose from their cushions.

"That's not fair," the chubby one said. "I protest."

"Still is good joke," Gor leRog said, trying to peel the quick-drying paint from his furry face.

"The paint is indelible," Duval informed him.

"Good, good," leRog exclaimed. "Much funnier that way."

"This is illegal competition," the chubby man protested again.

"Forgive." Furry paws waved in the air. "This is Mr. Duval, Boffo Unlimited, Earth." The paws scratched vigorously at the paint-matted fur.

Contact dermatitis, Duval thought as he bowed. *Better tell the lab about that one.* The stuff was supposedly inert, but with alien biochemistries...No, come to think of it, the contact dermatitis made it even funnier—at least, to the Vachii.

MR CORDWAINER, Jolly Enterprises, New Bristol," Gor leRog said.

The swarthy Arcturan dropped his monocle of tinted glass to the end of its jeweled metallic ribbon and bowed coldly. "We have met before," he said precisely. "Much to my sorrow."

"Oh, blood enemies? Wonderful."

Cordwainer glared.

"And Herr Holzfeur, Neuland Devices, Vega II," leRog concluded.

The chubby gentleman, who had protested a moment before, blinked nearsightedly behind contact lenses that enlarged his irises half again and said, "Howdja do, I'm sure."

He thrust out a pouting lower lip.

"Your sales approach was not one authorized by the Vegan Covenant. I shall have to report you to the Free Trade Board, of course."

"Do that," Duval said nastily. That made things dandy, he thought. An official protest because he didn't use the standard competitive phrases, specified by law. Feurholz looked like the type who would make trouble.

"Please, business afterwards," Gor leRog protested.

They found seats about the lacquered table. Duval glared at Feurholz, then stared fixedly at the low ceramic dish in the center of the table as etiquet demanded. The single sprig of Malka Reed was uglier than the usual Vachii arrangement, which probably meant that it was a particularly fine example of the twig-bending art. Its stem was warped and blistered with the marks of the parasites introduced under the bark to give it a tortured shape.

THE PURITY of the display, Duval noted, had been destroyed by a small beaten gold box which rested next to the dish. It was unadorned and certainly, with the plentiness of gold among the Vachii, not intrinsically valuable. He wondered for a moment if he and the others were being insulted.

Gor leRog's sudden bellow snapped him from his thoughts. Silent servitors glided through the room, bearing endless dishes of greasy Vachii food. Duval counted twenty-three courses before the room began to blurr before his eyes. Cordwainer, he saw, was getting a little green. Feurholz, on the contrary, seemed in his element as he stuffed himself with a blunt left hand.

Finally the steaming cups of wine arrived.

Duval burped loudly. He waited as Cordwainer and Feurholz followed. Feurholz's tribute was, he decided, louder than necessary.

"Thank you, thank you," Gor leRog sighed. "Now..."

"I am enpowered by my company," Duval said tonelessly, "to say that we can offer you outstanding service and merchandise far beyond the ability of our competitors."

"No, no," Feurholz wailed. "You said 'far beyond.' You've violated the covenant."

"Oh, shut up," Cordwainer snapped.

"I'll protest."

"Please," Gor leRog said.

IN THE ensuing quiet Cordwainer said, "I am en-

powered by my company..."

Duval tried to stifle a yawn.

Feurholz glared daggers at Duval and repeated the phrase.

"Very good," Gor leRog said. "Now we haggle."

"Bargain," Cordwainer said.

"Of course. First though, Mr. Duval, please to open box on the table."

Duval leaned forward and picked up the gold case. The inside was lined with black fabric. A single white capsule much like a vitamin tablet, rested inside in a depression in the black cloth.

"I don't understand," Cordwainer said.

"Is antidote," leRog said from the doorway.

"Antidote?"

"Yes." Gor leRog began to giggle. "For the poison in the wine." He ducked through the doorway, and a heavy panel slid into place behind him.

They were all on their feet and at the door at the same moment. Feurholz began to pound on the panel. "Metal," he sobbed. "The filthy beast."

"Is not polite to be abusive," a voice said.

CORDWAINER whirled and grabbed for one of the draperies lining the wall. The fabric fell from its moorings, revealing a speaker set high in the wall. "What are you up to?"

"Is test of competition. Vachii custom."

"Test?" Feurholz yelled. "You poison us and call it a test?"

"Not necessarily all," leRog's voice replied. "At least one, maybe two, maybe all three. Is for you to decide."

"The Terran Navy will blow this place apart," Duval said.

"Who ever heard of this kind of test?" Feurholz demanded.

"Is Vachii rule. Pass test. Get monopoly."

"All right," Cordwainer said slowly. "What's the test?"

"Ah, sweet reasonable," Gor leRog said. "Is simplicity. One or more poisoned. Only one capsule antidote."

Feurholz suddenly turned and dived for the table. His hand grabbed for the gold box.

"Wait. Antidote is poison also." Feurholz dropped the box as if he had been burned.

"All right," Duval said, "you've got the whip hand. What's your test?"

"Most reasonable. Test is this. One or more of wine was poisoned. Antidote will kill. Each must decide if he poisoned. If so, take antidote. If not, walk to door, knock, and ask out. In either case, must justify answer. No guesses."

"This is inhuman," Feurholz objected.

"Am not human," Gor leRog pointed out.

CORDWAINER began to swear slowly and deliberately.

"Almost forgot," Gor le-Rog's voice came again. "Is symptom of poison. In fifteen minutes, color bleach out of irises. Die within twelve hours after without antidote. Knock on door for out. Only one man, though. Goodbye."

"Oh, fine," Duval said. "Now we all sit, looking soulfully into each other's eyes and wait to see who dies."

"This is not a bit funny," Feurholz said. "I'm going to report you all to the Free Trade Board."

"You make too much noise." Cordwainer looked at his wristwatch.

Duval found his former seat and waited for the other two to sit down. Cordwainer pursed his lips and looked at the Earthman. "I don't think you'll get the best of me on this one."

"That's what you said on Biddiver with the exploding caviar."

"You've both been poisoned," Feurholz said, "and you want to talk about caviar ...Sturgeon's eggs."

"Cheer up," Duval said drily. "They just exploded; they weren't poisoned."

"You look a little bleached," Cordwainer said.

FEURHOLZ'S hands flew to his cheeks.

"He means your face, not your eyes," Duval said.

"I can do my own explaining, thank you."

"Sorehead."

"What time is it?" Feurholz said.

Duval looked at the man. Did those faded blue eyes seem a bit more colorless? He couldn't be sure.

"It should be any minute," Cordwainer said.

"You sound almost pleased about it," Feurholz said. "Think of something."

No doubt about it, Laval thought. *They're fading almost as if...Yes, they're going to be pink.*

Cordwainer had clasped his hands over his knees and lowered his face between his arms.

What's he up to? Laval thought. He waited silently, his skin prickling. His eyes were beginning to burn. Could that mean...? He looked at the gold box on the table. *No,* he thought, *imagination.*

Then he looked at Cordwainer again. The man hadn't moved. Silent minutes passed. *It must have happened by now,* he thought. Feurholz was looking at him intently.

"See anything interesting?" he demanded.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" The little man looked at Cordwainer, who still had his head between his arms.

SUDDENLY Duval knew what Cordwainer was up

to. "Look," he yelled at Feurholz and pointed. The little man's head turned sharply just as Cordwainer lifted his head. His black eyes had become a startling pink.

"Very clever," Cordwainer said angrily.

"Not at all," Duval said. "It was obvious you were depending on some sudden reaction from us to tell you if you had changed."

"No, not from you," the Arcturan said. "I thought Feurholz might give it away."

"I resent that."

"Well, it was a good try."

"Better luck next time." Duval rose to his feet and began to explore the room. The stone walls, he saw, were composed of the sedimentary rock of the area. Where the hangings revealed the underlying wall, a thin layer of colored plaster had been spread to give a coarse textured effect. The rock under the hangings was unfinished.

"What are you looking for?" Cordwainer said, his pink eyes gleaming.

"Another door."

"You probably won't find one. Gor leRog's too clever."

"What if I did?" Feurholz demanded. "You don't dare leave the room until you know."

"Nor do you," Cordwainer said.

Duval returned to his seat and eyed the other two men. There was no doubt about either by this time. Both men had the symptoms, too.

THERE HAD to be an answer to the problem. Gor leRog had said that this was a test, which meant that the answer was before him if he could follow the devious thinking of the rabbity alien.

Well, the obvious answer was that all three were poisoned. Duval realized, however, that he couldn't depend on that.

He sat, inspecting the lacquered table. Then...Of course, the reflection in the table. He leaned forward, trying to find his image in its surface.

"I've tried already," Cordwainer said. "It won't work."

It was true, Laval saw. The lacquer was black, and had been hand-rubbed to a dull satiny finish that gave back a hazy reflection, wherein it was impossible to determine colors. Certainly, he could tell nothing about his eyes.

"Checkmate," he said.

"Care to tell me?" Cordwainer asked. "Then at least one of us can make it."

Duval's reply was unprintable.

"It wouldn't do any good anyway," Feurholz said. "Gor leRog said we had to tell him *how* we knew. A guess won't qualify."

"That wouldn't be a guess," Cordwainer put in.

"You heard what I said," Duval said.

"That is a biological impossibility," Cordwainer objected.

AT THE end of the second hour, Duval could see that Feurholz was getting panicky. Cordwainer sat on his cushion, his eyes closed. For a moment Duval thought he was dozing.

"You know," Cordwainer said slowly, "we could go to the door and knock. Then, when he came to the door, we could o v e r p o w e r him. He must have some more of the antidote on the premises."

"Yes," Feurholz agreed, excitedly. "Yes, that's it."

"Huh, uh," Duval said. "He's undoubtedly thought of that. Besides, then none of us would get the contract."

"My God, man," Feurholz almost sobbed, "we may all be dying."

"D o e s that mean...?" Cordwainer began wolfishly.

"It doesn't mean anything," Feurholz said hotly.

They sank into s i l e n c e again. Duval's mind was traveling in circles. There had to be some logical a n s w e r. Only...

"Well," Cordwainer said, "at least one of us must have it."

"How so?"

"We'd all be seeing the other two as unchanged, otherwise, and..."

"That doesn't prove anything," Duval said. "If just *one* of us had the symptoms, he'd see the other two as unchanged, and that wouldn't prove a thing to him." He said it confidently, wondering if the other two would notice the obvious fallacy.

"Nor to the other two," Feurholz added. "They'd see only one man with the symptoms, and that wouldn't tell them anything about themselves."

Of course it would, Duval

"No," Cordwainer put in, thought, *because if only one man*

"this is incorrect. Gor le Rog said that at least one man was poisoned, so we can't all be right. One of us, at least *must* show the symptoms."

"You know damned good and well that's true," Feurholz said s u d d e n l y. He grabbed the gold box and pulled the capsule from its lining.

"Don't, you idiot," Cordwainer yelled.

"So, I don't have the symptoms," Feurholz said, his face triumphant.

"Don't be stupid," Duval said. "We don't care if the thing kills or cures you; we just don't want to see it used, in case *we* need it."

Feurholz's face sagged. He put the capsule back into its case, set the box on the table, then rose slowly to his feet. "I'm sick of this," he said, fumbling in a pocket of his tunic.

His hand appeared with a small needle gun. "Now," he

said, his voice shrill, "don't move,"

Duval and Cordwainer rose slowly.

"I said not to move."

"What do you think you'll do with that?" Cordwainer asked.

"Kill you if you don't tell me if I have the symptoms."

"And give up our chance to get out of here alive?" Duval said.

"EVEN NOW you're trying to trick me," Feurholz accused. "That question's based on the assumption that you both are poisoned. Perhaps one of you isn't, though; it's worth the risk."

"Which one?" Cordwainer asked.

"Try and find out. Don't think I won't kill you both, if one of you doesn't tell me the truth."

"Now, be r e a s o n a b l e," Cordwainer said, moving in on the little man.

"Keep back," F e u r h o l z said, hysterically.

"Of course, only..."

Cordwainer's foot lashed out and up, catching Feurholz in his gun arm. The weapon flipped through the air and slid into a corner. Cordwainer was on it before Duval could move.

He stood up, the weapon in his hand. "Now," he said, his swarthy face deadly, "the same a r r a n g e m e n t still holds."

He pointed the weapon at Feurholz. "We'll start with our little Vegan friend, since David doesn't scare too easily."

Feurholz stopped nursing his arm, and eyed the menacing weapon. Then he began to laugh.

"Very well, since you're so amused," Cordwainer said.

He pulled the trigger; a paper snake jumped from the muzzle.

"Our *Cobra-matic*," Feurholz laughed.

Duval covered the distance in one jump, and punched Cordwainer in the stomach. Cordwainer went "o m p h," and sat down hard. "Now, "let's try to act like logical human beings."

AN HOUR later, they were still acting like logical human beings, though Cordwainer looked as if he would like to become illogical any moment.

Duval bit his lip. *I can't stand much more of this,* he thought. *There has to be an answer. Gor leRog said at least one and possibly more. Only...*

Only...

If only Cordwainer and Feurholz were poisoned and Duval were not, then each of the first two would see only one man with the symptoms. *Now, putting myself in Cordwainer's place under those circumstances... Well, Cordwainer would know that if he*

himself did not have the symptoms, and if I, Duval, did not have the symptoms, and Feurholz did...Then Feurhoz, seeing no symptoms and knowing that at least one of them had been poisoned, would reason that he, Feurholz, was poisoned and...

Duval snorted in disgust. That only proved that at least two in the circle were poisoned and he knew that already.

He tried it again. If *one* man saw no symptoms, then he would know he were the one poisoned. But none of them knew—therefore each of them saw at least one man who was poisoned. Now, the minimum number for that was...

Three?

Duval almost smiled in triumph. No—not conclusive. If only two were poisoned, then every man would see the symptoms in at least one man.

ASSUMING that only Cordwainer and Feurholz were posioned, then Cordwainer would see the symptoms in Feurholz, and Feurholz would see the symptoms in Cordwainer. Duval, of course, would see—and did see—the symptoms in each of the other two.

His head began to ache.

Besides, that was an obvious beginning. Cordwainer was clever; he certainly must have seen that one. And Feurholz? Well, he was panicky, but he was no fool.

"Look," Cordwainer said softly, "tell me and I'll see that you get the antidote. We'll split the profits fifty-fifty."

Duval looked at him. *This could mean,* he thought, *that I am all right. Cordwainer certainly couldn't make that promise with any certainty unless I didn't need the antidote.*

He saw the man's eyes widen.

Was that it?

"You can have all the profits." Feurholz quavered. "Just tell me. I'll see that you get the antidote."

That was it. Duval jumped to his feet.

HE STARTED for the door. At the last moment he turned. Cordwainer was grinning crookedly. "Doesn't work that way, does it?"

"No, I guess not," Duval said as he returned to his seat.

He picked up the gold box and turned it on its side; neither man changed expression. "*It* doesn't reflect either," Cordwainer said. He leaned back to stretch.

Two men, two men, two men, the phrase ran through Laval's brain. But Cordwainer was clever enough to see that and...

He opened the gold box and popped the capsule into his mouth.

Feurholz yelled.

Cordwainer opened his

eyes and leaped to his feet even as Duval reached the door panel and began to pound on it. The door slid open and he fell through. He heard the door whisper shut behind him.

He found Gor leRog in what passed among the Vachii for his study and gave him the answer.

"It should have been obvious from the start," he said.

"But was not," Gor leRog said. "Fear warps thoughts."

"They're both intelligent men and Cordwainer is capable of thinking under fire. I know that from Biddiver."

"Is good joke, nontheless."

"A very good joke and a clever test."

IT WAS A clever test, Duval thought—partly because the answer was really very simple, if you approached it logically. He'd proven to himself that at least two men in the circle must be poisoned. Otherwise one of the other two would have solved the problem earlier. The fact that Duval saw two men with the symptoms had almost confused him.

"Contract yours, of course," Gor leRog said.

And, Duval thought, if you assumed that both of the others had arrived at the same conclusion—that there were a minimum of two poisoned men—it followed that all three must be poisoned. For, if Duval himself were not, and Cordwainer saw only one poisoned man—Feurholz—then Cordwainer would know that he himself must be the other, and he would have taken the antidote. The same reasoning applied to Feurholz; both of them had to see two men with the symptoms of the poison.

"What about the others?" Duval demanded. "You'll have to give them the antidote."

"Are not poisoned—at least, not to die."

"What?"

"Just turn blue all over in twelve hours. Good joke?"

Duval began to laugh.

"HERE IS contract," leRog said, handing him an impressive scroll covered with seals.

"Thank you," he said. "I can find my way out."

"Good night," Gor leRog said.

Duval walked through the darkened hall to the alcove. He stopped before a polished slab of silver opposite the door to inspect his eyes.

They were quite pink.

Then he noticed something else, as he heard Gor leRog's high-pitched laughter.

In the mirror, his face and hands were glowing green.

He walked back to the study and floored Gor leRog with a single blow. "Is good joke," he mocked.

"Hah, hah," Duval said, "Rabbit punch," he walked out.

The Gardener

(*continued from page* 109)

and I don't see," said Brick. "He lives in a world of stars and atoms and forces that keep the worlds in place. He dreams of these things while the rest of us—well, I guess while the rest of us dream about the coming Saturday night date or whether we'll be able to get that new aluminum head for the rod.

"It's hard to be a friend to a guy like that. He's always so far ahead of you. I think almost all of you know how hard it is to be a friend to Jimmy..."

No, it isn't, Brick, he said fiercely under his breath. It isn't ever going to be hard to be a friend to Jimmy again. He knew now that there were many things Mr. Barton hadn't told him, many reasons why he had to remain in this place before he joined the others of his kind. He was learning for the first time that it had been as difficult for the Tom Marlows and the Mr. Mooremeisters as it had been for him.

I'll show you, Brick. I'll show all of you, he murmured to himself. I'll be your friend. Honest I will.

HUMAN INTEREST

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Since our conversation at the Philadelphia conference, I've read several copies of your magazines and my impressions were generally favorable. I mentioned this to Robert. Madle when he was up here last Friday and he suggested I drop you a line and let you know that. So here are one reader's reactions to his first readings of your magazines.

As I say, my impressions have generally been favorable and I think I've read enough —two issues of *Science Fiction Stories*, one issue of *Future* and the latest *Science Fiction Quarterly*—to form a reasonably sound opinion. I like what you're trying to do and I think you're pretty well succeeding at doing it.

Strangely enough, however, those stories which were of the type I've been looking for seemed to be the least successful. "Occupational Risk" in the January *Science Fiction Stories* is a case in point, as is Eric Frank Russell's, "Heav'n, Heav'n." Both of these are good human interest stories, but they don't hit me very hard or seem to be saying anything new.

It seemed to me that the author of "Occupational Risk" was trying to write a story about love and marriage against a space travel background, but that his insight and his general level of writing really weren't on a higher level than the average slick love story. All he proved was that they'll be writing the same kind of love stories in the future that they write today. There was no real insight into the way that the relationships between men and women may develop—and yet the background is such that he could have made all sorts of points.

What I'm trying to say is that if a writer wants to write a love story set against an interplanetary background, he should have better models in mind than the *Saturday Evening Post*. And I think that the taste and intelligence of your readers is high enough that they would prefer something better.

But I still like what was being attempted here and I hope you'll encourage your writers to attempt more of the same kind of thing.

Judith Merril's "Homecalling" was worthy of the amount of space you gave it. I thought it was a nicely worked out story with some very believable characters. It probably lacked that quality of "significance"—in the sense of being a commentary on life—but in this case I don't think that was important. The other values more than made up for any lack of profundity. And I'd rather have a writer tell a good story well than try to solve the problems of the world badly.

"Women's Work" was another good job—much better than some of the things by Leinster I've been reading elsewhere recently.

There were several other stories that I thought were quite good, but I mentioned the ones that interested me most. There were also some that I didn't care for at all, but those aren't worth dwelling on. As Jacques Barzun said, a civilized man should be known more by his enthusiasms and affinities than by his dislikes.

Your editorial, and Paul Kalin's letter in *Science-Fiction Quarterly* raise some points. I agree with Mr. Kalin that a man should work out his own standards and not be controlled by the opinions of the peer group, but I still think there's a lot to be said for trying to get a larger public and critical acceptance of science-fiction.

When I read something which I think is important and of value, then I naturally want to see it reach as wide an audience, as possible. I think that what the author says deserves a wide audience, or I feel that the people to whom I recommend the book will get as much out of it as I did. This has nothing to do with trying to win the approval of others. I'm merely trying to do a small favor for the author (who likes to be read), for the thing he has expressed (of which I approve), and for my friends.

And that is what is behind this continual push to have science-fiction accepted as literature. I think there has been much good writing in the field and that what certain of our writers have used the field to say is a valuable contribution to modern writing. Chad Oliver, for example, is at least as good a writer as most of the gentlemen to be found in the pages of *Discovery* or *New World Writing*. And what he has said is a lot fresher and more important than the things the literary boys have been saying. The same goes for Fredric Brown, Robert Heinlein, Judith Merril and several others.

I'd like to see science-fiction accepted as a part of our literature because I think it deserves to be, and because I think our literature would benefit from what some science-fiction writers have done. And I think science-fiction would benefit, because the boys would be competing against the very best there is in all fields, and not merely against the best in their own circle.

This is being written cold, without any revision, so it's probably not too clear in places. But I do want you to know that I'll be reading your magazines and that I'll be rooting for you.

THOMAS PURDOM
4461 Hurley St.,
Philadelphia, Penna.

I think that the most we can hope for is not that science fiction, as a whole, will be accepted as "part of our literature", but rather that

(a) specific works of science fiction may gain wider acceptance, and (b) more and more people, serious critics among them, may reach the point where they no longer assume that anything and everything labelled "science fiction" is ipso facto *worthless.*

OPTIMISTIC

Dear Doc:

Or is that greeting passe? If so, my apologies.

W. G. Catherington's letter in your September issue caused me to dig back into my files of several years ago—and that digging was accompanied by not a few sighs of nostalgia.

His reference to *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic*, I think, provided a major clue to his discontent with the present quality of science fiction.

When Ziff Davis discontinued their pulps, and placed a revitalized *Amazing* and *Fantastic* on the stands, it was a major science fiction event. The story quality was high, the names were big and you couldn't ask for two more attractive magazines. *Fantastic's* first issue won a Certificate of Excellence from the American Institute of Graphic Arts, if you recall.

There seemed to be just one major difficulty; sales were never up to expectations. Without participation from the public, Howard Browne couldn't afford to continue buying fiction from Ray Bradbury, B. Traven, Truman Capote or Samuel Hopkins Adams.

So the beautiful covers, the colored interior illustrations, the fine grade of paper and the Big Names fell by the wayside. Space opera and action fiction took over—and still sells the magazines.

In one way, the tremendous popularity of science fiction is a myth. The top quality stuff is appreciated by enough persons that a small group of magazines publish slick-type material and pay top rates. The following isn't strong enough to support the entire field.

The list of authors Mr. Catherington presented was an impressive one, and I wish every one of the names he mentions was producing stf today.

However, Van Vogt is tied up in his chosen field of mental health; Neville, the last I knew, was a technical magazine writer; Frederic Brown must find detective fiction most profitable; Bixby—damned if I know what he's doing, besides playing the

Ackerman piano; Leiber is one of the editors of *Science Digest;* Rocklynne swears he just doesn't want to write any more; Finney never was a standard fixture in stf magazines; Doar hits the slicks consistently; Bester—read "Quien Sabe" in the recent *Science Fiction Quarterly* contest; Evans is finding books more profitable and satisfying than magazine sales.

Like Mr. Catherington, I miss the old guard. When I started reading stf, many of those he mentioned had not yet been heard from. Frankly, I miss the group that preceded them, too.

But I'm inclined to be optimistic about the field, e'en so. Simak, Lesser, Silverberg, Garrett, Miller, Sturgeon, Clinton, Asimov (get it right), Clarke, Anderson, Reynolds—some new to the field, some "oldtimers"—all have had recent magazine bylines.

It's quite likely that five years from now, someone will write you a letter bewailing the absence of such as these from stf magazines. But there'll be other top-flighters to take their places. Writers who lose interest or fail to find satisfaction in one niche manage to turn to another, I've found.

There's a final comment on magazine science fiction—a dark one—I'd like to bring up: Once, magazines were the elite of science fiction. Today television, movies and books have taken over to the extent that magazines, in many instances, have been relegated to stepchildren of the industry.

Science fiction is spread too thin for its audience. Sad, but true.

GENE HUNTER,
Alhambra, California

My personal guess is that Fantastic *tried to go too far, too fast. The most expensive authors, plus extra fancy covers and colored artwork, etc., all at once, made the magazine's break-even point much too high for any chance of survival unless the sales were phenomenal. Had they been willing to start on a higher plane than the competition, but still within reason so far as costs went, they might have built up to the point where they'd now be firmly established, and perhaps able to offer all they did the way they actually started.*

It's easy to second guess other people's magazines, isn't it?

There's ample data for either the optimistic or the pessimistic view.

12-ISSUE REPORT

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Truthfully, the first time I wrote you, back when I sent you my ratings on volumes one and two of *Future,* I hadn't expected to see my survey in print. But now it almost seems like a tradition and I hoped you've been waiting for this one, though I'm sorry to be b e h i n d time. I've moved around a bit since 1954 and must ask you to with-hold my address; but if anyone wants to write to me, as some did before, you can forward their letters and I'll send you any replies to forward, if that's all right.

Things got rather confused in 1954 didn't they? Well, I'm going by the volumes, so this covers *Future Science Fiction* from June to October 1954 and *Science Fiction Stories* from January 1955 to May 1956. I'm not including *Future* Numbers 28, 29 and 30 or the two issues of SFS before it took over FSF's numbering.

For the three best covers, I nominate March 1956; September 1955 and May 1956—all by Emsh. None of the other nine covers struck me as being less than good, so I won't mention the three "least attractive" as I did the last two times.

The way I make up my ratings is like this. As soon as I've finished an issue, I type up a list of the contents, then file the paper away for at least two months. When I take the sheet out again, I put a number beside each story *without looking it up in the magazine.* It's strictly a matter of how I remember a story after I've read a lot of others. The "1's" are the stories that still seem to be excellent after plenty of time to think them over. These are stories I'd want to put into an anthology if I could make up an anthology from your magazines, just the way I'd like to. These are the very best. The "2's" are just below that; I'd list them, say, in the appendix of my anthology as "special honorable mention" or "also recommended"; they are all very good.

Most of the stories in any worthwhile magazine over a period of time fall into the "3" spot. These are the good, dependable kind that you enjoy reading and can feel sure of finding in a magazine you follow regularly. They're the backbone, and the 1, 2, and 3 list are on the credit side of the ratings.

On the other side are the "4's" and "5's". The "4's" are stories that are readable, but nothing more than that—the

kind that you might not get back to finishing if you were interrupted, and wouldn't feel you'd missed anything if you didn't finish them. The "5's" show where the editor dropped the ball.

I get out the magazines and look them over, after I've made the ratings, only for the sake of comments. That's why, sometimes, I wonder why I didn't rate a particular story higher.

It's a nice tradition that Mr. Freeman started, and I'm following it through by setting up three sets of parenthesis before each title, as with his previous lists. The first figure shows Mr. Freeman's rating. The second represents my own rating, on second consideration—but also without referring to the story. The third set is blank for you readers to fill in if you'd like to get out your pencils, and join in.

As before, I'm not rating any story "5", because all were accepted in the sincere belief that they were such as Mr. Freeman would have rated "3", at least. But, on second thought, I admit that "4" might apply to some.

(1) (2) ( ) The Marvellous Movie—Abernathy: an often-used theme is given an impact that makes it seem new.

(1) (2) ( ) Guide Wire—Hensley: vivid, and with a legitimate surprise ending.

(1) (1) ( ) Gift of the Gods—Jones: excellent characterization and believable conflict.

(1) (1) ( ) The Pattern—Ellanby: this makes me think of the oldtime science fiction, only with better, contemporary writing.

(1) (1) ( ) Last Stand—Budrys: a fine portrayal of character's development from wise-guy to mature person.

(1) (1) ( ) Live In Amity—Jourdan: this author ought to write more often, but if he needs a lot of time between stories, that's okay; he's worth waiting for!

(1) (1) ( ) Perfectly Adjusted—Dickson: too funny to be a tragedy and too tragic to be a comedy, but wonderful nonetheless.

(1) (1) ( ) Decoy—Christopher: a quiet, compelling tale.

(1) (1) ( ) Day After Fear—Merwin Jr.: it's unusual when Merwin's character portrayal is as good as this.

(1) (1) ( ) Giants In The Earth—Blish: the word "clas-

sic" has been abused, but I think it really applies here.

(1) (1) ( ) The Instigators—Banks: I don't cry easily, but this one brought tears to my eyes. It took will power not to stop and re-read it when I was typing this list.

(1) (1) ( ) Spaceman's Van Gogh—Simak: the "big-time" editors would have been afraid of it; thus, more credit to you.

(1) (2) ( ) The Non-Statistical Man—Jones: I started to put this down as a "2", but I decided that the author's irritating idiosyncracies hadn't downgraded the story below first rank.

(2) (2) ( ) Hail To The Chief—Sackett: good, but I can't stomach so much of a story in italics. *(Mea culpa! RAWL)*

(2) (2) ( ) Asylum—Bullock: it had a punch, all right, but was too depressing for my taste.

(2) (2) ( ) Dead On Departure—Lesser: also depressing, but this wasn't what bothered me; don't know why I didn't rate it higher.

(2) (2) ( ) Conventional Ending—too bad this wasn't the first story of its kind, because it's the best of an overworked lot.

(2) (1) ( ) Ripeness—Pease: improved as it went along, and ended very well.

(2) (2) ( ) The Ear-Friend—Banks: awfully good, but somehow not entirely convincing.

(2) (2) ( ) In Working Order—Moore: a little too dependent upon some of the author's other stories to stand by itself.

(2) (2) ( ) Ugly Duckling—Constant: also improved and ended well, but was too

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folksy at the beginning for my liking.

(2) (2) ( ) Saraband in C Sharp Major—Russell: slight and on the cute side; old theme, not well enough transformed for top rating.

(2) (2) ( ) Service Call—Dick: powerful, but the fundamental "gimmick" is still overdone.

(2) (1) ( ) No More Barriers—Dickson: absorbing, very well worked-out, but misses the top through overearnestness, I think.

(2) (1) ( ) Full Cycle—Simak: if I hadn't read all the "City" series by this author, I'd have rated this as a "1". Well worth your featuring nonetheless.

(2) (2) ( ) Female of the Species—De Vet: a big improvement over this author's previous suspense-adventures.

(2) (2) ( ) Through A Glass Darkly—Lesser: fine story, but I wasn't entirely convinced of the basic situation.

(2) (2) ( ) Comes The Revolution—Franson: as with "Conventional Ending", it's a shame that this wasn't the first of its kind.

(2) (1) ( ) Living Space—Asimov: thoroughly enjoyable, but I prefer Ike when he's serious and the humor is incidental.

(3) (3) ( ) Peace On Earth—Cox: I remember only that it was good reading.

(3) (2) ( ) Sales Pitch—Dick: could have been excellent, but the author spread the butter too thick.

(3) (2) ( ) Rescue—Cox: over-familiar theme, competently done.

(3) (2) ( ) Cure Guaranteed—Sherred: a contrived ending weakened a story that was tops up to then.

(3) (3) ( ) Rosie Lived In a Bubble—Schere: all I can recall is that I liked it.

(3) (2) ( ) Of Such As These—Cox: routine until the theme is fully revealed, then okay.

(3) (3) ( ) Meddler—Dick: better written than numerous others of its kind, but still over-familiar when finished.

(3) (1) ( ) Despite All Valor—Budrys: too compressed; this should have been a novelet.

(3) (2) ( ) The Crime Therapist—Bradley: I'm weary of psychiatric stories, even ones with an original twist like this.

(3) (2) ( ) Inherit The Earth—Schere: am also tired of this kind of story.

(3) (2) ( ) The Two Sharp Edges—Budrys: the story impressed me less than

the writing, which was good.

(3) (2) ( ) It Should Happen To A Dog—Wiegand: uproarious in spots but lacked the subtlety I demand in humor.

(3) (2) ( ) Caution Advisable—Moore: author's personal touch makes familiar theme enjoyable.

(3) (2) ( ) Path of Darkness—Pease: good problem story of the old school.

(3) (3) ( ) Playback—Marks: this had the light touch all right, but I just don't find it credible.

(3) (3) ( ) Protective Camoflaugue—De Vet: good action tale, with interesting twist.

(3) (3) ( ) Telestassis—Pease: interesting, but not convincing to me.

(3) (2) ( ) The Wilhelm Spot—Cole: well written and convincing, but the theme wasn't fresh enough for me.

(3) (2) ( ) Farewell, Mr. Ridley—Lesser: should have been a novelet; when I finished it, I wanted more.

(3) (2) ( ) The Idealists—Klass: routine approach to a good story.

(3) (3) ( ) Bloomers of Shizar—Stearns: amusing, as no doubt intended.

(3) (2) ( ) With A Dime On Top Of It—Budrys: in writing and characterization, a "1"; I just don't like this kind of story.

(3) (2) ( ) Project Flatty—Cox: another sermon, but briefer and more to the point.

(4) (3) ( ) Intimate Invasion—Merwin Jr.: smooth, slick, goes down well; goes out of the mind easily, too.

(4) (4) ( ) The Silent Colony—Silverberg: has atmosphere, but that's about all.

(4) (3) ( ) The Next Time—Jamieson: this has been done too often before.

(4) (3) ( ) Repeat Performance—Cox: I was interrupted on this one and never got back to it.

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(4) (3) ( ) Oldest Man In The World—Winterbotham: I feel a bit stupid, but the point evaded me.

(4) (3) ( ) The Three Spacemen—GHSmith: well, if you like fables, okay.

(4) (4) ( ) Shrine of Hate —GHSmith: likewise.

(4) (3) ( ) Stranger —Harmon: TV script stuff.

(4) (2) ( ) Vacationer — Merwin, Jr.: sorry, I don't go for this author's way of writing, usually.

(4) (3) ( ) The Dessicator—Silverberg: mildly amusing.

(5) (4) ( ) Design in Statistics—Cox: will the author kindly purchase a pulpit from the proceeds of his next sale?

(5) (3) ( ) Crossroad — Cox: as above.

(5) (4) ( ) Time's A Gorilla—Winterbotham: again, the point eluded me.

(5) (4) ( ) Last Chance —de Mille: ah, woe—Cox has a disciple!

Out of a total of 66 stories, I picked 13 as definitely top rate, and 16 very close to the top; 23 were enjoyable stories —the kind that make you put the magazine down with a feeling of satisfaction. This makes a total of 52 which were decidedly an asset to the magazine. Of the liabilities, 10 were no disgrace, but nothing I'd have minded missing; and the last 4 were the kind I'd have preferred to have missed.

How does this compare with the 1952/1954 issues? Well, there was one more story in the 12 issues discussed in my last issue, and one more "1" rating. The "very goods" came to 11 stories last time, so 1954/1956 shows an advance here. The "enjoyable" or "3" list has 23 entries, as opposed to 20 for volumes 3 and 4. Thus the assets have gone up, and the liabilities down—only 10 so-so stories this time, and only 4 I thought pretty sad.

General verdict: you've held your own and are pushing ahead. Hope we can eliminate that "5" category completely when I go over Volumes 7 and 8, a couple of years from now!

WILLIS FREEMAN

As before, I've bravely refrained from comment on your comments, except in the case of "Hail To The Chief". Putting all that material in italics was my own doing, and I've regretted it since.

Incidentally, are the rest of you joining in with these ratings, relying entirely upon memory as Mr. Freeman and I do? Would you like to see this "tradition" maintained?

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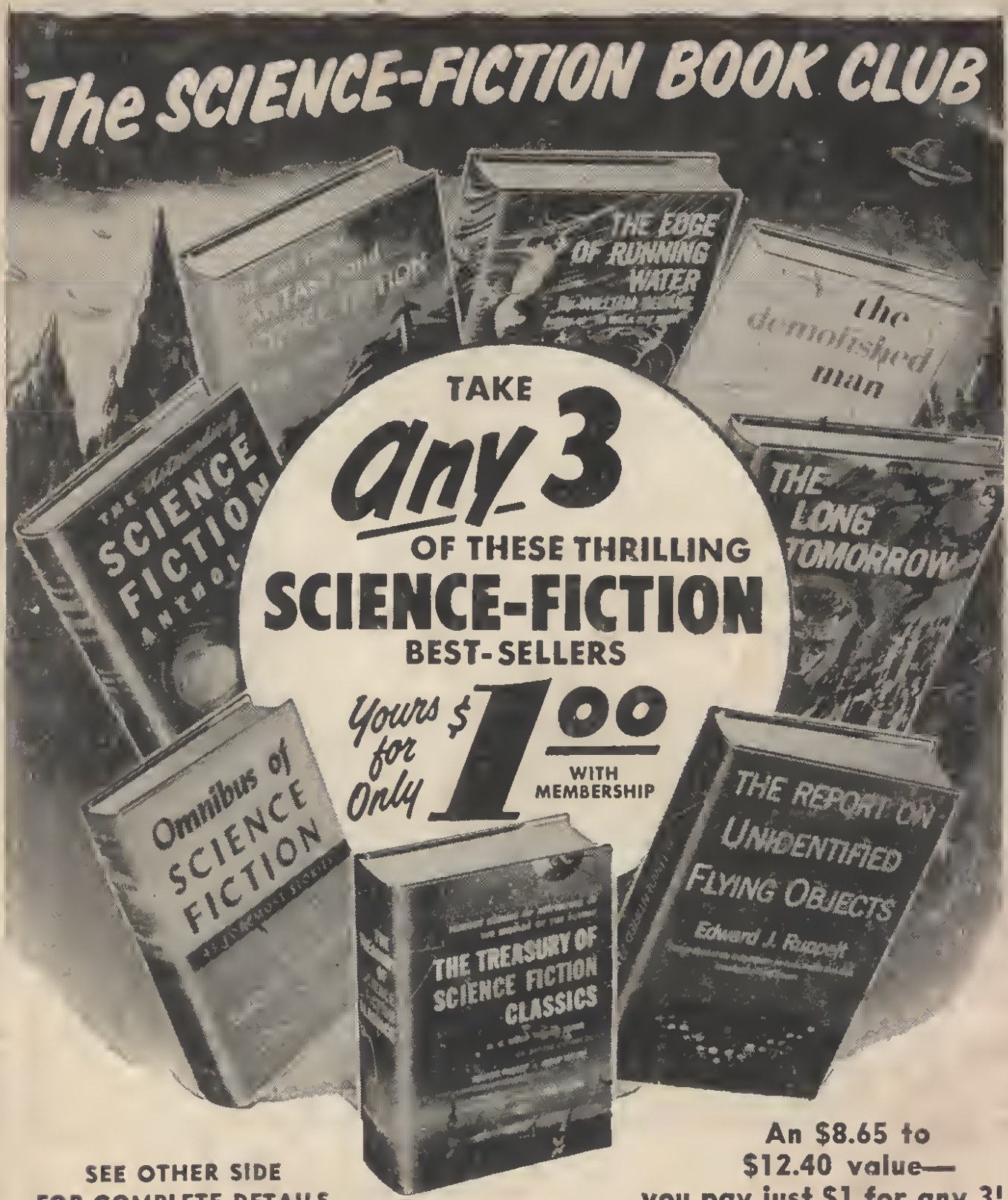

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